

**WATCH AND WARD**  
**LONGSTAFF'S MARRIAGE**  
**EUGENE PICKERING**  
**AND OTHER TALES**

890



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BY  
HENRY JAMES

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## NOTE

THE stories in this volume were not included by Henry James in the "New York" edition of his works. *Watch and Ward*, which appeared serially in the *Atlantic Monthly*, 1871, was first published as a volume in 1878. *Longstaff's Marriage* and *Benvolio* are taken from *The Madonna of the Future, and Other Tales*, 1879; *Eugene Pickering* from *A Passionate Pilgrim, and Other Tales*, 1875; *The Impressions of a Cousin* from *Tales of Three Cities*, 1884.

P. L.



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# I

ROGER LAWRENCE had come to town for the express purpose of doing a certain act, but as the hour for action approached he felt his ardour rapidly ebbing. Of the ardour that comes from hope, indeed, he had felt little from the first ; so little that as he whirled along in the train he wondered to find himself engaged in this fool's errand. But in default of hope he was sustained, I may almost say, by despair. He should fail, he was sure, but he must fail again before he could rest. Meanwhile he was restless enough. In the evening, at his hotel, having roamed aimlessly about the streets for a couple of hours in the dark December cold, he went up to his room and dressed, with a painful sense of having but partly succeeded in giving himself the figure of an impassioned suitor. He was twenty-nine years old, sound and strong, with a tender heart, and a genius, almost, for common-sense ; his face told clearly of youth and kindness and sanity, but it had little other beauty. His complexion was so fresh as to be almost absurd in a man of his age,—an effect rather enhanced by a too early baldness. Being extremely short-sighted, he went with his head thrust forward ; but as this infirmity is considered by persons who have studied the picturesque to impart an air of distinction, he may have the benefit of the possibility. His figure was compact and sturdy, and, on the whole, his best

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point ; although, owing to an incurable personal shyness, he had a good deal of awkwardness of movement. He was fastidiously neat in his person, and extremely precise and methodical in his habits, which were of the sort supposed to mark a man for bachelorhood. The desire to get the better of his diffidence had given him a certain formalism of manner which many persons found extremely amusing. He was remarkable for the spotlessness of his linen, the high polish of his boots, and the smoothness of his hat. He carried in all weathers a peculiarly neat umbrella. He never smoked ; he drank in moderation. His voice, instead of being the robust barytone which his capacious chest led you to expect, was a mild, deferential tenor. He was fond of going early to bed, and was suspected of what is called " fussing " with his health. No one had ever accused him of meanness, yet he passed universally for a cunning economist. In trifling matters, such as ~~the~~ choice of a shoemaker or a dentist, his word carried weight ; but no one dreamed of asking his opinion on politics or literature. Here and there, nevertheless, an observer less superficial than the majority would have whispered you that Roger was an undervalued man, and that in the long run he would come out even with the best. " Have you ever studied his face ? " such an observer would say. Beneath its simple serenity, over which his ruddy blushes seemed to pass like clouds in a summer sky, there slumbered a fund of exquisite human expression. The eye was excellent ; small, perhaps, and somewhat dull, but with a certain appealing depth, like the tender dumbness in the gaze of a dog. In repose Lawrence may have looked stupid ; but as he talked his face slowly brightened by gradual fine degrees, until at the end of an hour it inspired you with a confidence so perfect as to be in some degree a tribute to its owner's intellect,

as it certainly was to his integrity. On this occasion Roger dressed himself with unusual care and with a certain sober elegance. He debated for three minutes over two cravats, and then, blushing in his mirror at his puerile vanity, he reassumed the plain black tie in which he had travelled. When he had finished dressing it was still too early to go forth on his errand. He went into the reading-room of the hotel, but here soon appeared two smokers. Wishing not to be infected by their fumes, he crossed over to the great empty drawing-room, sat down, and beguiled his impatience with trying on a pair of lavender gloves.

While he was so engaged there came into the room a person who attracted his attention by the singularity of his conduct. This was a man of less than middle age, good-looking, pale, with a pretentious, pointed moustache and various shabby remnants of finery. His face was haggard, his whole aspect was that of grim and hopeless misery. He walked straight to the table in the centre of the room, and poured out and drank without stopping three full glasses of ice-water, as if he were striving to quench some fever in his vitals. He then went to the window, leaned his forehead against the cold pane, and drummed a nervous tattoo with his long stiff finger-nails. Finally he strode over to the fireplace, flung himself into a chair, leaned forward with his head in his hands, and groaned audibly. Lawrence, as he smoothed down his lavender gloves, watched him and reflected. "What an image of fallen prosperity, of degradation and despair! I have been fancying myself in trouble; I have been dejected, doubtful, anxious. I am hopeless. But what is my sentimental sorrow to this?" The unhappy gentleman rose from his chair, turned his back to the chimney-piece, and stood with folded arms gazing at Lawrence, who was seated opposite to him. The young man sustained his glance, but

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with sensible discomfort. His face was as white as ashes, his eyes were as lurid as coals. Roger had never seen anything so tragic as the two long harsh lines which descended from his nose, beside his mouth, in seeming mockery of his foppish, relaxed moustache. Lawrence felt that his companion was going to address him ; he began to draw off his gloves. The stranger suddenly came towards him, stopped a moment, eyed him again with insolent intensity, and then seated himself on the sofa beside him. His first movement was to seize the young man's arm. " He is simply crazy ! " thought Lawrence. Roger was now able to appreciate the pathetic disrepair of his appearance. His open waistcoat displayed a soiled and crumpled shirt-bosom, from whose empty buttonholes the studs had recently been wrenched. In his normal freshness he must have looked like a gambler with a run of luck. He spoke in a rapid, excited tone, with a hard, petulant voice.

" You'll think me crazy, I suppose. Well, I shall be soon. Will you lend me a hundred dollars ? "

" Who are you ? What is your trouble ? " Roger asked.

" My name would tell you nothing. I'm a stranger here. My trouble,—it's a long story ! But it's grievous, I assure you. It's pressing upon me with a fierceness that grows while I sit here talking to you. A hundred dollars would stave it off,—a few days at least. Don't refuse me ! " These last words were uttered half as an entreaty, half as a threat. " Don't say you haven't got them,—a man that wears such pretty gloves ! Come ; you look like a good fellow. Look at me ! I'm a good fellow, too. I don't need to swear to my being in distress."

Lawrence was touched, disgusted, and irritated. The man's distress was real enough, but there was something horribly disreputable in his manner. Roger



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declined to entertain his request without learning more about him. From the stranger's persistent reluctance to do more than simply declare that he was from St. Louis, and repeat that he was in a tight place, in a d——d tight place, Lawrence was led to believe that he had been dabbling in crime. The more he insisted upon some definite statement of his circumstances, the more fierce and peremptory became the other's petition. Lawrence was before all things deliberate and perspicacious; the last man in the world to be hustled and bullied. It was quite out of his nature to do a thing without distinctly knowing why. He of course had no imagination, which, as we know, should always stand at the right hand of charity; but he had good store of that wholesome discretion whose place is at the left. Discretion told him that his companion was a dissolute scoundrel, who had sinned through grievous temptation, perhaps, but ~~who~~ had certainly sinned. His misery was palpable, but Roger felt that he could not patch up his misery without in some degree condoning his vices. It was not in his power, at any rate, to present him, out of hand, a hundred dollars. He compromised. "I can't think of giving you the sum you ask," he said. "I have no time, moreover, to investigate your case at present. If you will meet me here to-morrow morning, I will listen to anything you shall have made up your mind to say. Meanwhile, here are ten dollars."

The man looked at the proffered note and made no movement to accept it. Then raising his eyes to Roger's face,—eyes streaming with tears of helpless rage and baffled want,—"O, the devil!" he cried. "What can I do with ten dollars? D——n it, I don't know how to beg. Listen to me! If you don't give me what I ask, I shall cut my throat! Think of that. On your head be the penalty!"

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Lawrence pocketed his note and rose to his feet. "No, decidedly," he said, "you don't know how to beg!" A moment after, he had left the hotel and was walking rapidly toward a well-remembered dwelling. He was shocked and discomposed by this brutal collision with want and vice; but as he walked, the cool night air suggested sweeter things. The image of his heated petitioner was speedily replaced by the calmer figure of Isabel Morton.

He had come to know Isabel Morton three years before, through a visit she had then made to one of his neighbours in the country. In spite of his unventurous tastes and the even tenor of his habits, Lawrence was by no means lacking, as regards life, in what the French call *les grandes curiosités*; but from an early age his curiosity had chiefly taken the form of a timid but strenuous desire to fathom the depths of matrimony. He had dreamed of this gentle bondage as other men dream of the "free unhoused condition" of celibacy. He had been born a marrying man, with a conscious desire for progeny. The world in this respect had not done him justice. It had supposed him to be wrapped up in his petty comforts: whereas, in fact, he was serving a devout apprenticeship to the profession of husband and father. Feeling at twenty-six that he had something to offer a woman, he allowed himself to become interested in Miss Morton. It was rather odd that a man of tremors and blushes should in this line have been signally bold; for Miss Morton had the reputation of being extremely fastidious, and was supposed to wear some dozen broken hearts on her girdle, as an Indian wears the scalps of his enemies.

It is said that, as a rule, men fall in love with their opposites; certainly Lawrence's mistress was not fashioned in his own image. He was the most unobtrusively natural of men; she, on the other

hand, was pre-eminently artificial. She was pretty, but not really so pretty as she seemed ; clever, but not intelligent ; amiable, but not sympathetic. She possessed in perfection the manner of society, which she lavished with indiscriminate grace on the just and the unjust, and which very effectively rounded and completed the somewhat meagre outline of her personal character. In reality, Miss Morton was keenly ambitious. A woman of simpler needs, she might very well have accepted our hero. He offered himself with urgent and obstinate warmth. She esteemed him more than any man she had known,—so she told him ; but she added that the man she married must satisfy her heart. Her heart, she did not add, was bent upon a carriage and diamonds.

From the point of view of ambition, a match with Roger Lawrence was not worth discussing. He was therefore dismissed with gracious but inexorable firmness. From this moment the young man's sentiment hardened into a passion. Six months later he heard that Miss Morton was preparing to go to Europe. He sought her out before her departure, urged his suit afresh, and lost it a second time. But his passion had cost too much to be flung away unused. During her residence abroad he wrote her three letters, only one of which she briefly answered, in terms which amounted to little more than this : " Dear Mr. Lawrence, *do* leave me alone ! " At the end of two years she returned, and was now visiting her married brother. Lawrence had just heard of her arrival, and had come to town to make, as we have said, a supreme appeal.

Her brother and his wife were out for the evening ; Roger found her in the drawing-room, under the lamp, teaching a stitch in crochet to her niece, a little girl of ten, who stood leaning at her side. She seemed to him prettier than before ; although, in fact, she

looked older and stouter. Her prettiness, for the most part, however, was a matter of coquetry ; and naturally, as youth departed, coquetry filled the vacancy. She was fair and plump, and she had a very pretty trick of suddenly turning her head and showing a charming white throat and ear. Above her well-filled corsage these objects produced a most agreeable effect. She always dressed in light colours, but with unerring taste. Charming as she may have been, there was, nevertheless, about her so marked a want of the natural, that, to admire her particularly, it was necessary to be, like Roger, in love with her. She received him with such flattering friendliness and so little apparent suspicion of his purpose, that he almost took heart and hope. If she did not fear a declaration, perhaps she desired one. For the first half-hour Roger's attack hung fire. Isabel talked to better purpose than before she went abroad, and for the moment he sat tongue-tied for very modesty. Miss Morton's little niece was a very pretty child ; her hair was combed out into a golden cloud, which covered her sloping shoulders. She kept her place beside her aunt, clasping one of the latter's hands, and staring at Lawrence with that sweet curiosity of little girls. There glimmered mistily in the young man's brain a vision of a home-scene in the future,—a lamp-lit parlour on a winter night, a placid wife and mother wreathed in household smiles, a golden-haired child, and, in the midst, his sentient self, drunk with possession and gratitude. As the clock struck nine the little girl was sent to bed, having been kissed by her aunt and re-kissed—or un-kissed shall I say?—by her aunt's lover. When she had disappeared, Roger proceeded to business. He had proposed so often to Miss Morton, that, actually, practice had begun to tell. It took but a few moments to make his meaning plain. Miss Morton addressed

herself to her niece's tapestry, and, as her lover went on with manly eloquence, glanced up at him from her work with feminine keenness. He spoke of his persistent love, of his long waiting and his passionate hope. Her acceptance of his hand was the only thing that could make him happy. He should never love another woman ; if she now refused him, it was the end of all things ; he should continue to exist, to work and act, to eat and sleep, but he should have ceased to *live*.

" In Heaven's name," he said, " don't answer me as you have answered me before."

She folded her hands, and with a serious smile, " I shall not, altogether," she said. " When I have refused you before, I have simply told you that I could not love you. I cannot love you, Mr. Lawrence ! I must repeat it again to-night, but with a better reason than before. I love another man ; I am engaged."

Roger rose to his feet like a man who has received a heavy blow and springs forward in self-defence. But he was indefensible, his assailant inattackable. He sat down again and hung his head. Miss Morton came to him and took his hand and demanded of him, as a right, that he should be resigned. " Beyond a certain point," she said, " you have no right to thrust your regrets upon me. The injury I do you in refusing you is less than that I should do you in accepting you without love."

He looked at her with his eyes full of tears. " Well ! I shall never marry," he said. " There is something you cannot refuse me. Though I shall never possess you, I may at least espouse your memory and live in intimate union with your image. I shall live with my eyes fixed upon it." She smiled at this fine talk ; she had heard so much in her day ! He had fancied himself prepared for the worst, but as he walked back

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to his hotel, it seemed intolerably bitter. Its bitterness, however, quickened his temper, and prompted a violent reaction. He would now, he declared, cast his lot with pure reason. He had tried love and faith, but they would none of him. He had made a woman a goddess, and she had made him a fool. He would henceforth care neither for woman nor man, but simply for comfort, and, if need should be, for pleasure. Beneath this gathered gust of cynicism the future lay as hard and narrow as the silent street before him. He was absurdly unconscious that good humour was lurking round the very next corner.

It was not till near morning that he was able to sleep. His sleep, however, had lasted less than an hour when it was interrupted by a loud noise from the adjoining room. He started up in bed, lending his ear to the stillness. The sound was immediately repeated ; it was that of a pistol-shot. This second report was followed by a loud, shrill cry. Roger jumped out of bed, thrust himself into his trousers, quitted his room, and ran to the neighbouring door. It opened without difficulty, and revealed an astonishing scene. In the middle of the floor lay a man, in his trousers and shirt, his head bathed in blood, his hand grasping the pistol from which he had just sent a bullet through his brain. Beside him stood a little girl in her nightdress, her long hair on her shoulders, shrieking and wringing her hands. Stooping over the prostrate body, Roger recognised, in spite of his bedabbled visage, the person who had addressed him in the parlour of the hotel. He had kept the spirit, if not the letter, of his menace. " O father, father, father ! " sobbed the little girl. Roger, overcome with horror and pity, stooped towards her and opened his arms. She, conscious of nothing but the presence of human help, rushed into his embrace and buried her head in his grasp.

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The rest of the house was immediately aroused, and the room invaded by a body of lodgers and servants. Soon followed a couple of policemen, and finally the proprietor in person. The fact of suicide was so apparent that Roger's presence was easily explained. From the child nothing but sobs could be obtained. After a vast amount of talking and pushing and staring, after a physician had affirmed that the stranger was dead, and the ladies had passed the child from hand to hand through a bewildering circle of caresses and questions, the multitude dispersed, and the little girl was borne away in triumph by the proprietor's wife, further investigation being appointed for the morrow. For Roger, seemingly, this was to have been a night of sensations. There came to him, as it wore away, a cruel sense of his own accidental part in his neighbour's tragedy. His refusal to help the poor man had brought on the catastrophe. The idea haunted him awhile ; but at last, with an effort, he dismissed it. The next man, he assured himself, would have done no more than he ; might possibly have done less. He felt, however, a certain indefeasible fellowship in the sorrow of the little girl. He lost no time, the next morning, in calling on the wife of the proprietor. She was a kindly woman enough, but so thoroughly the mistress of a public house that she seemed to deal out her very pity over a bar. She exhibited toward her protégée a hard, business-like charity which foreshadowed vividly to Roger's mind the poor child's probable portion in life, and repeated to him the little creature's story, as she had been able to learn it. The father had come in early in the evening, in great trouble and excitement, and had made her go to bed. He had kissed her and cried over her, and, of course, made her cry. Late at night she was aroused by feeling him again at her bedside, kissing her, fondling

her, raving over her. He bade her good-night and passed into the adjoining room, where she heard him fiercely knocking about. She was very much frightened ; she fancied he was out of his mind. She knew that their troubles had lately been thickening fast ; now the worst had come. Suddenly he called her. She asked what he wanted, and he bade her get out of bed and come to him. She trembled, but she obeyed. On reaching the threshold of his room she saw the gas turned low, and her father standing in his shirt against the door at the other end. He ordered her to stop where she was. Suddenly she heard a loud report and felt beside her cheek the wind of a bullet. He had aimed at her with a pistol. She retreated in terror to her own bedside and buried her head in the clothes. This, however, did not prevent her from hearing a second report, followed by a deep groan. Venturing back again, she found her father on the floor, bleeding from the face. " He meant to kill her, of course," said the landlady, " that she mightn't be left alone in the world. It's a wonderful mixture of cruelty and kindness ! "

It seemed to Roger an altogether pitiful tale. He related his own interview with the deceased, and the latter's menace of suicide. " It gives me," he said, " a sickening sense of connexion with this bloodshed. But how could I help it ? All the same, I wish he had taken my ten dollars."

Of the antecedent history of the dead man they could learn little. The child had recognised Lawrence, and had broken out again into a quivering convulsion of tears. Little by little, from among her sobs, they gathered a few facts. Her father had brought her during the preceding month from St. Louis ; they had stopped some time in New York. Her father had been for months in great want of money. They had once had money enough ; she could not say



what had become of it. Her mother had died many months before ; she had no other kindred nor friends. Her father may have had friends, but she never saw them. She could indicate no source of possible assistance or sympathy. Roger put the poor little fragments of her story together. The most salient fact among them all was her absolute destitution.

" Well, sir," said the proprietress, " living customers are better than dead ones ; I must go about my business. Perhaps you can learn something more." The little girl sat on the sofa with a pale face and swollen eyes, and, with a stupefied, helpless stare, watched her friend depart. She was by no means a pretty child. Her clear auburn hair was thrust carelessly into a net with broken meshes, and her limbs encased in a suit of rusty, scanty mourning. In her appearance, in spite of her childish innocence and grief, there was something undeniably vulgar. " She looks as if she belonged to a circus troupe," Roger said to himself. Her face, however, though without beauty, was not without interest. Her forehead was symmetrical and her mouth expressive. Her eyes were light in colour, yet by no means colourless. A sort of arrested, concentrated brightness, a soft introversion of their rays, gave them a remarkable depth. " Poor little betrayed, unfriended mortal ! " thought the young man.

" What is your name ? " he asked.

• " Nora Lambert," said the child.

" How old are you ? "

" Twelve."

" And you live in St. Louis ? "

" We used to live there. I was born there."

" Why had your father come to the East ? "

" To make money."

" Where was he going to live ? "

" Anywhere he could find business."

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"What was his business?"

"He had none. He wanted to find some."

"You have no friends nor relations?"

The child gazed a few moments in silence. "He told me when he woke me up and kissed me, last night, that I had not a friend in the world nor a person that cared for me."

Before the exquisite sadness of this statement Lawrence was silent. He leaned back in his chair and looked at the child,—the little forlorn, precocious, potential woman. His own sense of recent bereavement rose powerful in his heart and seemed to respond to hers. "Nora," he said, "come here."

She stared a moment, without moving, and then left the sofa and came slowly towards him. She was tall for her years. She laid her hand on the arm of his chair and he took it. "You have seen me before," he said. She nodded. "Do you remember my taking you last night in my arms?" It was his fancy that, for an answer, she faintly blushed. He laid his hand on her head and smoothed away her thick disordered hair. She submitted to his consoling touch with a plaintive docility. He put his arm round her waist. An irresistible sense of her childish sweetness, of her tender feminine promise, stole softly into his pulses. A dozen caressing questions rose to his lips. Had she been to school? Could she read and write? Was she musical? She murmured her answers with gathering confidence. She had never been to school; but her mother had taught her to read and write a little, and to play a little. She said, almost with a smile, that she was very backward. Lawrence felt the tears rising to his eyes; he felt in his heart the tumult of a new emotion. Was it the inexpugnable instinct of paternity? Was it the restless ghost of his buried hope? He thought of his angry vow the night before to live only for himself

and turn the key on his heart. "From the lips of babes and sucklings . . ."—he softly mused. Before twenty-four hours had elapsed a child's fingers were fumbling with the key. He felt deliciously contradicted ; he was after all but a lame egotist. Was he to believe, then, that he could not live without love, and that he must take it where he found it ? His promise to Miss Morton seemed still to vibrate in his heart. But there was love and love ! He could be a protector, a father, a brother. What was the child before him but a tragic embodiment of the misery of isolation, a warning from his own blank future ? "God forbid !" he cried. And as he did so, he drew her towards him and kissed her.

At this moment the landlord appeared with a scrap of paper, which he had found in the room of the deceased ; it being the only object which gave a clue to his circumstances. He had evidently burned a mass of papers just before his death, as the grate was filled with fresh ashes. Roger read the note, which was scrawled in a hurried, vehement hand, and ran as follows:—

"This is to say that I must—I must—I must ! Starving, without a friend in the world, and a reputation worse than worthless,—what can I do ? Life's impossible. Try it yourself. As regards my daughter, —anything, everything is cruel ; but this is the shortest way."

"She has had to take the longest, after all," said the proprietor, *sotto voce*, with a kindly wink at Roger. The landlady soon reappeared with one of the ladies who had been present overnight,—a little pushing, patronising woman, who seemed strangely familiar with the various devices of applied charity. "I have come to arrange," she said, "about our subscription for the little one. I shall not be able to contribute

myself, but I will go round among the other ladies with a paper. I have just been seeing the reporter of the *Universe*; he is to insert a kind of 'appeal,' you know, in his account of the affair. Perhaps this gentleman will draw up our paper? And I think it will be a beautiful idea to take the child with me."

Lawrence was sickened. The world's tenderness had fairly begun. Nora gazed at her energetic benefactress, and then, with her eyes, appealed mutely to Roger. Her glance, somehow, moved him to the soul. Poor little disfathered daughter,—poor little uprooted germ of womanhood! Her innocent eyes seemed to more than beseech,—to admonish almost, and command. Should he speak and rescue her? Should he subscribe the whole sum, in the name of human charity? He thought of the risk. She was an unknown quantity. Her nature, her heritage, her good and bad possibilities, were an unsolved problem. Her father had been an adventurer; what had her mother been? Conjecture was useless; she was a vague spot of light on a dark background. He was unable even to decide whether, after all, she was plain.

"If you want to take her round with you," said the landlady to her companion, "I had better just sponge off her face."

"No indeed!" cried the other, "she is much better as she is. If I could only have her little nightgown with the blood on it! Are you sure the bullet didn't strike your dress, deary? I am sure we can easily get fifty names at five dollars apiece. Two hundred and fifty dollars. Perhaps this gentleman will make it three hundred. Come, sir, now!"

Thus adjured, Roger turned to the child. "Nora," he said, "you know you are quite alone. You have no home." Her lips trembled, but her eyes were

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fixed and fascinated. "Do you think you could love me?" She flushed to the tender roots of her tumbled hair. "Will you come and try?" Her range of expression of course was limited; she could only answer by another burst of tears.

## II

"I HAVE adopted a little girl, you know," Roger said, after this, to a number of his friends ; but he felt, rather, as if she had adopted him. He found it somewhat difficult to make his terms with the sense of actual paternity. "It was indeed an immense satisfaction to feel, as time went on, that there was small danger of his repenting of his bargain. It seemed to him more and more that he had obeyed a divine voice ; though indeed he was equally conscious that there was something comical in a sleek young bachelor turning nurse and governess. But for all this he found himself able to look the world squarely in the face. At first it had been with an effort, a blush, and a deprecating smile that he spoke of his pious venture ; but very soon he began to take a robust satisfaction in alluding to it freely. There was but one man of whose jocular verdict he thought with some annoyance, — his cousin Hubert Lawrence, namely, who was so terribly clever and trenchant, and who had been through life a commentator formidable to his modesty, though, in the end, always absolved by his good nature. But he made up his mind that, though Hubert might laugh, he himself was serious ; and to prove it equally to himself and his friends, he determined on a great move. He withdrew altogether from his profession, and prepared to occupy his house in the country. The latter was

immediately transformed into a home for Nora,—a home admirably fitted to become the starting-point of a happy life. Roger's dwelling stood in the midst of certain paternal acres,—a little less than a "place," a little more than a farm; deep in the country, and yet at two hours' journey from town. Of recent years a dusty disorder had fallen upon the house, telling of its master's long absences and his rare and restless visits. It was but half lived in. But beneath this pulvérous deposit the rigid household gods of a former generation stand erect on their pedestals. As Nora grew older, she came to love her new home with an almost passionate fondness, and to cherish its transmitted memories as a kind of compensation for her own obliterated past. There had lived with Lawrence for many years an elderly woman, of exemplary virtue, Lucinda Brown by name, who had been a personal attendant of his mother, and since her death had remained in his service as the lonely warden of his villa. Roger had an old-time regard for her, and it seemed to him that her housewifely gossip might communicate to little Nora a ray of his mother's peaceful domestic genius. Lucinda, who had been divided between hope and fear as to Roger's possibly marrying,—the fear of a diminished empire having exceeded, on the whole, the hope of company below stairs,—accepted Nora's arrival as a very comfortable compromise. The child was too young to menace her authority, and yet of sufficient importance to warrant a gradual extension of the household economy. Lucinda had a vision of new carpets and curtains, of a regenerated kitchen, of a series of new caps, of her niece coming to sew. Nora was the narrow end of the wedge; it would broaden with her growth. Lucinda therefore was gracious.

For Roger it seemed as if life had begun afresh and the world had put on a new face. High above

the level horizon now, clearly defined against the empty sky, rose this small commanding figure, with the added magnitude that objects acquire in this position. She gave him a great deal to think about. The child a man begets and rears weaves its existence insensibly into the tissue of his life, so that he becomes trained by fine degrees to the paternal office. But Roger had to skip experience, and spring with a bound into the paternal consciousness. In fact he missed his leap, and never tried again. Time should induct him at leisure into his proper honours, whatever they might be. He felt a strong aversion to claim in the child that prosaic right of property which belongs to the paternal name. He eagerly accepted his novel duties and cares, but he shrank with a tender humility of temper from all precise definition of his rights. He was too young and too sensible of his youth to wish to give this final turn to things. His heart was flattered, rather, by the idea of living at the mercy of change which might always be change for the better. It lay close to his heart, however, to drive away the dusky fears and sordid memories of Nora's anterior life. He strove to conceal the past from her childish sense by a great pictured screen of present joys and comforts. He wished her life to date from the moment he had taken her home. He had taken her for better, for worse ; but he longed to quench all baser chances in the daylight of actual security. His philosophy in this as in all things was extremely simple,—to make her happy that she might be good. Meanwhile as he cunningly devised her happiness, his own seemed securely established. He felt twice as much a man as before, and the world seemed as much again a world. All his small stale merits became fragrant with the virtue of unselfish use.

One of his first acts, before he left town, had been to divest Nora of her shabby mourning and dress



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her afresh in childish colours. He learned from the proprietor's wife at his hotel that this was considered by several ladies interested in Nora's fortunes (especially by her of the subscription) an act of gross impiety ; but he held to his purpose, nevertheless. When she was freshly arrayed, he took her to a photographer and made her sit for half a dozen portraits. They were not flattering ; they gave her an aged, sombre, lifeless air. He showed them to two old ladies of his acquaintance, whose judgement he valued, without saying whom they represented ; the ladies pronounced her a "fright." It was directly after this that Roger hurried her away to the peaceful, uncritical country. Her manner here for a long time remained singularly docile and spiritless. She was not exactly sad, but neither was she cheerful. She smiled, as if from the fear to displease by not smiling. She had the air of a child who has been much alone, and who has learned quite to underestimate her natural right to amusement. She seemed at times hopelessly, defiantly torpid. "Heaven help me !" thought Roger, as he surreptitiously watched her ; "is she going to be simply stupid ?" He perceived at last, however, that her listless quietude covered a great deal of observation, and that growing may be a very soundless process. His ignorance of the past distressed and vexed him, jealous as he was of admitting even to himself that she had ever lived till now. He trod on tiptoe in the region of her early memories, in the dread of reviving some dormant claim, some ugly ghost. Yet he felt that to know so little of her twelve first years was to reckon without an important factor in his problem ; as if, in spite of his summons to all the fairies for this second baptism, the godmother-in-chief lurked maliciously apart. Nora seemed by instinct to have perceived the fitness of not speaking of her own affairs, and

indeed displayed in the matter a precocious good taste. Among her scanty personal effects the only object referring too vividly to the past had been a small painted photograph of her mother, a languid-looking lady in a low-necked dress, with a good deal of rather crudely rendered prettiness. Nora had apparently a timid reserve of complacency in the fact, which she once imparted to Roger with a kind of desperate abruptness, that her mother had been a public singer; and the heterogeneous nature of her own culture testified to some familiarity with the scenery of Bohemia. The common relations of things seemed quite reversed in her brief experience, and immaturity and precocity shared her young mind in the freest fellowship. She was ignorant of the plainest truths and credulous of the quaintest falsities; unversed in the commonest learning and instructed in the rarest. She barely knew that the earth is round, but she knew that Leonora is the heroine of *Il Trovatore*. She could neither write nor spell, but she could perform the most surprising tricks with cards. She confessed to a passion for strong green tea, and to an interest in the romances of the Sunday newspapers. Evidently she had sprung from a horribly vulgar soil; she was a brand snatched from the burning. She uttered various impolite words with the most guileless accent and glance, and was as yet equally unsuspicious of the grammar and the Catechism. But when once Roger had straightened out her phrase she was careful to preserve its shape; and when he had decimated her vocabulary she made its surviving particles suffice. For the rudiments of theological learning, also, she manifested a due respect. Considering her makeshift education, he wondered she was so much of a lady. His impression of her father was fatal, ineffaceable; the late Mr. Lambert had been a blackguard. Roger had a fancy, however, that this was not all the truth.

He was free to assume that the poor fellow's wife had been of a gentle nurture and temper ; and he even framed on this theme an ingenious little romance, which gave him a great deal of comfort. Mrs. Lambert had been deceived by the impudent plausibility of her husband, and had come to her senses amid shifting expedients and struggling poverty, during which she had been glad to turn to account the voice which the friends of her happier girlhood had praised. She had died outwearied and broken-hearted, invoking human pity on her child. Roger established in this way a sentimental intimacy with the poor lady's spirit, and exchanged many a greeting over the little girl's head with this vague maternal shape. But he was by no means given up to these thin-spun joys ; he gave himself larger satisfactions. He determined to drive in the first nail with his own hands, to lay the smooth foundation-stones of Nora's culture, to teach her to read and write and cipher, to associate himself largely with the growth of her primal sense of things. Behold him thus converted into a gentle pedagogue, prompting her with small caresses and correcting her with smiles. A moted morning sunbeam used to enter his little study, and, resting on Nora's auburn hair, seemed to make of the place a humming school-room. Roger began also to anticipate the future exactions of preceptorship. He plunged into a course of useful reading, and devoured a hundred volumes on education, on hygiene, on morals, on history. He drew up a table of rules and observances for the child's health ; he weighed and measured her food, and spent hours with Lucinda, the minister's wife, and the doctor, in the discussion of her regimen and clothing. He bought her a pony, and rode with her over the neighbouring country, roamed with her in the woods and fields, and picked out nice acquaintances for her among the little damsels of the country-side. A

doting granddam, in all this matter, could not have shown a finer genius for detail. His zeal indeed left him very little peace, and Lucinda often endeavoured to assuage it by the assurance that he was fretting himself away and wearing himself thin on his happiness. He passed a dozen times a week from the fear of coddling and spoiling the child to the fear of letting her run wild and grow coarse and rustic. Sometimes he dismissed her tasks for days together, and kept her idling at his side in the winter sunshine; sometimes for a week he kept her within doors, reading to her, preaching to her, showing her prints, and telling her stories. She had an excellent musical ear, and the promise of a charming voice; Roger took counsel in a dozen quarters as to whether he ought to make her use her voice or spare it. Once he took her up to town to a *matinée* at one of the theatres, and was in anguish for a week afterwards, lest he had quickened some inherited tendency to dissipation. He used to lie awake at night, trying hard to fix in his mind the happy medium between coldness and weak fondness. With a heart full of tenderness, he used to measure out his caresses. He was in doubt for a long time as to what he should make her call him. At the outset he decided instinctively, against "papa." It was a question between "Mr. Lawrence" and his baptismal name. He weighed the proprieties for a week, and then he determined the child should choose for herself. She had as yet avoided addressing him by name; at last he asked what name she preferred. She stared rather blankly at the time, but a few days afterwards he heard her shouting "Roger!" from the garden under his window. She had ventured upon a small shallow pond enclosed by his land, and now coated with thin ice. The ice had cracked with a great report under her tread, and was swaying gently

beneath her weight, at some yards from the edge. In her alarm her heart had chosen, and her heart's election was never subsequently gainsaid. Circumstances seemed to affect her slowly ; for a long time she showed few symptoms of change. Roger in his slippers, by the fireside, in the winter evenings, used to gaze at her with an anxious soul, and wonder whether it was not only a stupid child that could sit for an hour by the chimney-corner, stroking the cat's back in absolute silence, asking neither questions nor favours. Then, meeting her intelligent eyes, he would fancy that she was wiser than he knew ; that she was mocking him or judging him, and counter-plotting his pious labours with elfish subtlety. Arrange it as he might, he could not call her pretty. Plain women are apt to be clever ; might she not (horror of horrors !) turn out too clever ? In the evening, after she had attended Nora to bed, Lucinda would come into the little library, and she and Roger would solemnly put their heads together. In matters in which he deemed her sex gave her an advantage of judgement, he used freely to ask her opinion. She made a great parade of motherly science, rigid spinster as she was, and hinted by many a nod and wink at the mystic depths of her sagacity. As to the child's being thankless or heartless, she quite reassured him. Didn't she cry herself to sleep, under her breath, on her little pillow ? Didn't she mention him every night in her prayers,—him, and him alone ? However much her family may have left to be desired as a " family,"—and of its shortcomings in this respect Lucinda had an altogether awful sense,—Nora was clearly a lady in her own right. As for her plain face, they could wait awhile for a change. Plainness in a child was almost always prettiness in a woman ; and at all events, if she was not to be pretty, she need never be proud.

Roger had no wish to remind his young companion of what she owed him ; for it was the very keystone of his plan that their relation should ripen into a perfect matter of course ; but he watched patiently, as a wandering botanist for the first woodland violets for the year, for the shy field-flower of spontaneous affection. He aimed at nothing more or less than to inspire the child with a passion. Until he had detected in her glance and tone the note of passionate tenderness his experiment must have failed. It would have succeeded on the day when she should break out into cries and tears and tell him with a clinging embrace that she loved him. So he argued with himself ; but, in fact, he expected perhaps more than belongs to the lame logic of this life. As a child, she would be too irreflective to play so pretty a part ; as a young girl, too self-conscious. I undertake, however, to tell no secrets. Roger, being by nature undemonstrative, continued to possess his soul in patience. Nora, meanwhile, seemingly showed as little of distrust as of positive tenderness. She grew and grew in ungrudged serenity. It was ~~in person~~, first, that she began gently, or rather ungently, to expand ; acquiring a well-nurtured sturdiness of contour, but passing quite into the shambling and sheepish stage of girlhood. Lucinda cast about her in vain for possibilities of future beauty, and took refuge in vigorous attention to the young girl's bountiful auburn hair, which she combed and braided with a kind of fierce assiduity. The winter had passed away, the spring was well advanced. Roger, looking at the object of his adoption, felt a certain sinking of the heart as he thought of his cousin Hubert's visit. As matters stood, Nora bore rather livelier testimony to his charity than to his taste.

He had debated some time as to whether he should write to Hubert and as to how he should write.

Hubert Lawrence was some four years his junior ; but Roger had always allowed him a large precedence in the things of the mind. Hubert had just commenced parson ; it seemed now that grace would surely lend a generous hand to nature and complete the circle of his accomplishments. He was extremely good-looking and clever with just such a cleverness as seemed but an added personal charm. He and Roger had been much together in early life and had formed an intimacy strangely compounded of harmony and discord. Utterly unlike in temper and tone, they neither thought nor felt nor acted together on any single point. Roger was constantly differing, mutely and profoundly, and Hubert frankly and sarcastically ; but each, nevertheless, seemed to find in the other an irritating counterpart and complement. They had between them a kind of boyish levity which kept them from lingering long on delicate ground ; but they felt at times that they belonged, by temperament, to irreconcilable camps, and that the more each of them came to lead his own life, the more their lives would diverge. Roger was of a loving turn of mind, and it 'cost him many a sigh that a certain glassy hardness of soul on his cousin's part was for ever blunting the edge of his affection. He nevertheless had a deep regard for Hubert ; he admired his talents, he enjoyed his society, he wrapped him about with his good-will. He had told him more than once that he cared for him more than Hubert would ever believe, could in the nature of things believe. He was willing to take his cousin seriously, even when he knew his cousin was not taking him so. Hubert, who reserved his faith for heavenly mysteries, had small credence for earthly ones, and he would have affirmed that to his perception they loved each other with a precisely equal ardour, beyond everything in life, to wit, but themselves. Roger had in his mind

a kind of metaphysical "idea" of a possible Hubert, which the actual Hubert took a wanton satisfaction in turning upside down. Roger had drawn in his fancy a pure and ample outline, into which the young ecclesiastic projected a perversely ill-fitting shadow. Roger took his cousin more seriously than the young man took himself. In fact, Hubert had apparently come into the world to play. He played at life, altogether; he played at learning, he played at theology, he played at friendship; and it was to be conjectured that, on particular holidays, he would play pretty hard at love. Hubert, for some time, had been settled in New York, and of late they had exchanged but few letters. Something had been said about Hubert's coming to spend a part of his summer vacation with his cousin; now that the latter was at the head of a household and a family, Roger reminded him of their understanding. He had finally told him his little romance, with a fine bravado of indifference to his verdict; but he was, in secret, extremely anxious to obtain Hubert's judgement of the heroine. Hubert replied that he was altogether prepared for the news, and that it must be a very pretty sight to see him at dinner pinning her bib, or to hear him sermonising her over a torn frock.

"But, pray, what relation is the young lady to me?" he added. "How far does the adoption go, and where does it stop? Your own proper daughter would be my cousin; but you can't adopt for other people. I shall wait till I see her; then if she is pleasing, I shall admit her into cousinship."

He came down for a fortnight, in July, and was soon introduced to Nora. She came sidling shyly into the room, with a rent in her short-waisted frock, and the *Child's Own Book* in her hand, with her finger in the history of *The Discreet Princess*. Hubert kissed her gallantly, and declared that he was happy



to make her acquaintance. She retreated to a station beside Roger's knee, and stood staring at the young man. "*Elle a les pieds énormes,*" said Hubert.

Roger was annoyed, partly with himself, for he made her wear big shoes. "What do you think of him?" he asked, stroking the child's hair, and hoping, half maliciously, that, with the frank perspicacity of childhood, she would make some inspired "hit" about the young man. But to appreciate Hubert's failings, one must have had vital experience of them. At this time, twenty-five years of age, he was a singularly handsome youth. Although of about the same height as his cousin, the pliant slimness of his figure made him look taller. He had a cool blue eye and clustering yellow locks. His features were cut with admirable purity; his teeth were white, his smile superb. "I think," said Nora, "that he looks like the *Prince Avenant*."

Before Hubert went away, Roger asked him for a deliberate opinion of the child. Was she ugly or pretty? was she interesting? He found it hard, however, to induce him to consider her seriously. Hubert's observation was exercised rather less in the interest of general truth than of particular profit; and of what profit to Hubert was Nora's shambling childhood? "I can't think of her as a girl," he said; "she seems to me a boy. She climbs trees, she scales fences, she keeps rabbits, she straddles upon your old mare. I found her this morning wading in the pond. She is growing up a hoyden; you ought to give her more civilising influences than she enjoys hereabouts; you ought to engage a governess, or send her to school. It is well enough now; but, my poor fellow, what will you do when she is twenty?"

You may imagine, from Hubert's sketch, that Nora's was a happy life. She had few companions, but during the long summer days, in woods and

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fields and orchards, Roger initiated her into all those rural mysteries which are so dear to childhood and so fondly remembered in later years. She grew more hardy and lively, more inquisitive, more active. She tasted deeply of the joy of tattered dresses and sun-burnt cheeks and arms, and long nights at the end of tired days. But Roger, pondering his cousin's words, began to believe that to keep her longer at home would be to fail of justice to the *ewig Weibliche*. The current of her growth would soon begin to flow deeper than the plummet of a man's wit. He determined, therefore, to send her to school, and he began with this view to investigate the merits of various seminaries. At last, after a vast amount of meditation and an extensive correspondence with the school-keeping class, he selected one which appeared rich in fair promises. Nora, who had never known an hour's schooling, entered joyously upon her new career ; but she gave her friend that sweet and long-deferred emotion of which I have spoken, when, on parting with him, she hung upon his neck with a sort of convulsive fondness. He took her head in his two hands and looked at her ; her eyes were streaming with tears. During the month which followed he received from her a dozen letters, sadly misspelled, but divinely lachrymose.

It is needless to relate in detail this phase of Nora's history, which lasted two years. Roger found that he missed her sadly ; his occupation was gone. Still, her very absence occupied him. He wrote her long letters of advice, told her everything that happened to him, and sent her books and useful garments, biscuits and oranges. At the end of a year he began to long terribly to take her back again ; but as his judgement forbade this measure, he determined to beguile the following year by travel. Before starting, he went to the little country town which was the

seat of her academy, to bid Nora farewell. He had not seen her since she left him, as he had chosen—quite heroically, poor fellow—to have her spend her vacation with a schoolmate, the bosom friend of this especial period. He found her surprisingly altered. She looked three years older; she was growing by the hour. Prettiness and symmetry had not yet been vouchsafed to her; but Roger found in her young imperfection a sweet assurance that her account with nature was not yet closed. She had, moreover, an elusive grace. She had reached that charming girlish moment when the crudity of childhood begins to be faintly tempered by the sense of sex. She was coming fast, too, into her woman's heritage of garrulity. She entertained him for a whole morning; she took him into her confidence; she rattled and prattled unceasingly upon all the swarming little school interests,—her likes and aversions, her hopes and fears, her friends and teachers, her studies and story-books. Roger sat grinning in high enchantment; she seemed to him the very genius of girlhood. For the very first time, he became conscious of her character; there was an immense deal of her; she overflowed. When they parted, he gave his hopes to her keeping in a long, long kiss. She kissed him too, but this time with smiles, not with tears. She neither suspected nor could she have understood the thought which, during this interview, had blossomed in her friend's mind. On leaving her, he took a long walk in the country over unknown roads. That evening he consigned his thought to a short letter, addressed to Mrs. Keith. This was the present title of the lady who had once been Miss Morton. She had married and gone abroad, where, in Rome, she had done as the Americans do, and entered the Roman Church. His letter ran as follows :—

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MY DEAR MRS. KEITH—I promised you once to be very unhappy, but I doubt whether you believed me ; you did not look as if you believed me. I am sure, at all events, you hoped otherwise. I am told you have become a Roman Catholic. Perhaps you have been praying for me at St. Peter's. This is the easiest way to account for my conversion to a worthier state of mind. You know that, two years ago, I adopted a homeless little girl. One of these days she will be a lovely woman. I mean to do what I can to make her one. Perhaps, six years hence, she will be grateful enough not to refuse me as you did. Pray for me more than ever. I have begun at the beginning ; it will be my own fault if I have not a perfect wife.

### III

ROGER'S journey was long and various. He went to the West Indies and to South America, whence, taking a ship at one of the eastern ports, he sailed round the Horn and paid a visit to Mexico. He journeyed thence to California, and returned home across the Isthmus, stopping awhile on his upward course at various Southern cities. It was in some degree a sentimental journey. Roger was a practical man; as he went he gathered facts and noted manners and customs; but the muse of observation for him was the little girl at home, the ripening companion of his own ripe years. It was for her sake that he collected impressions and laid up treasure. He had determined that she should be a lovely woman and a perfect wife; but to be worthy of such a woman as his fancy foreshadowed, he himself had much to learn. To be a good husband, one must first be a wise man; to educate her, he should first educate himself. He would make it possible that daily contact with him should be a liberal education, and that his simple society should be a benefit. For this purpose he should be a fountain of knowledge, a compendium of experience. He travelled in a spirit of solemn attention, like some grim devotee of a former age making a pilgrimage for the welfare of one he loved. He kept with great labour a copious diary, which he meant to read aloud on the winter nights of coming

years. His diary was directly addressed to Nora, she being implied throughout as reader or auditor. He thought at moments of his vow to Isabel Morton, and asked himself what had become of the passion of that hour. It had betaken itself to the common limbo of our dead passions. He rejoiced to know that she was well and happy ; he meant to write to her again on his return and tell her that he himself was as happy as she could wish to see him. He mused ever and anon on the nature of his affection for Nora, and wondered what earthly name he could call it by. Assuredly he was not in love with her : you could not fall in love with a child. But if he had not a lover's love, he had at least a lover's jealousy ; it would have made him miserable to believe his scheme might miscarry. It would fail, he fondly assured himself, by no fault of hers. He was sure of her future ; in that last interview at school he had guessed the answer to the riddle of her formless girlhood. If he could only be as sure of his own constancy as of hers ! On this point poor Roger might fairly have let his conscience rest ; but to test his resolution, he deliberately courted temptation, and on a dozen occasions allowed present loveliness to measure itself with absent promise. At the risk of a large expenditure of blushes, he bravely incurred the blandishments of various charming persons of the South. They failed signally, in every case but one, to quicken his pulses. He studied these gracious persons, he noted their gifts and graces, so that he might know the range of the feminine charm. Of the utmost that women can be and do he wished to have personal experience. But with the sole exception I have mentioned, not a syren of them all but shone with a radiance less magical than that dim but rounded shape which glimmered for ever in the dark future, like the luminous complement of

the early moon. It was at Lima that his poor little potential Nora suffered temporary eclipse. He made here the acquaintance of a young Spanish lady whose plump and full-blown innocence seemed to him divinely amiable. If ignorance is grace, what a lamentable folly to be wise ! He had crossed from Havana to Rio on the same vessel with her brother, a friendly young fellow, who had made him promise to come and stay with him on his arrival at Lima. Roger, in execution of this promise, passed three weeks under his roof, in the society of the lovely Teresita. She caused him to reflect, with a good deal of zeal. She moved him the more because, being wholly without coquetry, she made no attempt whatever to interest him. Her charm was the charm of absolute naïveté, and a certain tame unseasoned sweetness,—the sweetness of an angel who is without mundane reminiscences ; to say nothing of a pair of liquid hazel eyes and a coil of crinkled blue-black hair. She could barely write her name, and from the summer twilight of her mind, which seemed to ring with amorous bird-notes, she flung a disparaging shadow upon Nora's prospective condition. Roger thought of Nora, by contrast, as a kind of superior doll, a thing wound up with a key, whose virtues would make a *tic-tic* if one listened. Why travel so far about for a wife, when here was one ready made to his heart, as illiterate as an angel, and as faithful as the little page of a medieval ballad,—and with those two perpetual love-lights beneath her silly little forehead ?

Day by day, near the pretty Peruvian, Roger grew better pleased with the present. It was so happy, so ~~the~~ so secure ! He protested against the future. He grew impatient of the stiff little figure which he had posted in the distance, to stare at him with those monstrous pale eyes ; they seemed to grow and grow as he thought of them. In other words, he was in

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love with Teresa. She, on her side, was delighted to be loved. She caressed him with her fond dark looks and smiled perpetual assent. Late one afternoon they ascended together to a terrace on the top of the house. The sun had just disappeared ; the southern landscape was drinking in the cool of night. They stood awhile in silence ; at last Roger felt that he must speak of his love. He walked away to the farther end of the terrace, casting about in his mind for the fitting words. They were hard to find. His companion spoke a little English, and he a little Spanish ; but there came upon him a sudden perplexing sense of the infantine rarity of her wits. He had never done her the honour to pay her a compliment, he had never really talked with her. It was not for him to talk, but for her to perceive ! She turned about, leaning back against the parapet of the terrace, looking at him and smiling. She was always smiling. She had on an old faded pink morning dress, very much open at the throat, and a ribbon round her neck, to which was suspended a little cross of turquoise. One of the braids of her hair had fallen down, and she had drawn it forward, and was plaiting the end with her plump white fingers. Her nails were not fastidiously clean. He went towards her. When he next became perfectly conscious of their relative positions, he knew that he had tenderly kissed her, more than once, and that she had more than suffered him. He stood holding both her hands ; he was blushing ; her own complexion was undisturbed, her smile barely deepened ; another of her braids had come down. He was filled with a sense of pleasure in her sweetness, tempered by a vague feeling of pain in his all-too-easy conquest. There was nothing of poor Teresita but that you could kiss her ! It came upon him with a sort of horror that he had never yet distinctly told her that he loved her. " Teresa," he said, almost



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angrily, "I love you. Do you understand?" For all answer she raised his two hands successively to her lips. Soon after this she went off with her mother to church.

The next morning, one of his friend's clerks brought him a package of letters from his banker. One of them was a note from Nora. It ran as follows:—

DEAR ROGER—I want so much to tell you that I have just got the prize for the piano. I hope you will not think it very silly to write so far only to tell you this. But I am so proud I want you to know it. Of the three girls who tried for it, two were seventeen. The prize is a beautiful picture called "Mozart à Vienne"; probably you have seen it. Miss Murray says I may hang it up in my bedroom. Now I have got to go and practise, for Miss Murray says I must practise more than ever. My dear Roger, I do hope you are enjoying your travels. I have learned a great deal of geography, following you on the map. Don't ever forget your loving  
NORA.

After reading this letter, Roger told his host that he should have to leave him. The young Peruvian demurred, objected, and begged for a reason.

"Well," said Roger, "I find I am in love with your sister." The words sounded on his ear as if some one else had spoken them. Teresita's light was quenched, and she had no more fascination than a smouldering lamp, smelling of oil.

"Why, my dear fellow," said his friend, "that seems to me a reason for staying. I shall be most happy to have you for a brother-in-law."

"It's impossible! I am engaged to a young lady in my own country."

"You are in love here, you are engaged there, and you go where you are engaged! You Englishmen are strange fellows!"

"Tell Teresa that I adore her, but that I am pledged at home. I would rather not see her."

And so Roger departed from Lima, without further communion with Teresita. On his return home he received a letter from her brother, telling him of her engagement to a young merchant of Valparaiso,—an excellent match. The young lady sent him her salutations. Roger, answering his friend's letter, begged that the Doña Teresa would accept, as a wedding present, of the accompanying trinket,—a little brooch in turquoise. It would look very well with pink!

Roger reached home in the autumn, but left Nora at school till the beginning of the Christmas holidays. He occupied the interval in refurnishing his house, and clearing the stage for the last act of the young girl's childhood. He had always possessed a modest taste for upholstery; he now began to apply it under the guidance of a delicate idea. His idea led him to prefer, in all things, the fresh and graceful to the grave and formal, and to wage war throughout his old dwelling on the lurking mustiness of the past. He had a lively regard for elegance, balanced by a horror of wanton luxury. He fancied that a woman is the better for being well dressed and well domiciled, and that vanity, too stingily treated, is sure to avenge itself. So he took vanity into account. Nothing annoyed him more, however, than the fear of seeing Nora a precocious fine lady; so that while he aimed at all possible purity of effect, he stayed his hand here and there before certain admonitory relics of ancestral ugliness and virtue, embodied for the most part in hair-cloth and cotton damask. Chintz and muslin, flowers and photographs and books, gave their clear light tone to the house. Nothing could be more tenderly propitious and virginal, or better chosen both to chasten the young girl's aspirations and to remind her of her protector's tenderness.

Since his return he had designedly refused himself a glimpse of her. He wished to give her a single undivided welcome to his home and his heart. Shortly before Christmas, as he had even yet not set his house in order, Lucinda Brown was sent to fetch her from school. If Roger had expected that Nora would return with any striking accession of beauty, he would have had to say "Amen" with an effort. She had pretty well ceased to be a child; she was still his grave, imperfect Nora. She had gained her full height, — a great height, which her young strong slimness rendered the more striking. Her slender throat supported a head of massive mould, bound about with dense auburn braids. Beneath a somewhat serious brow her large, fair eyes retained their collected light, as if uncertain where to fling it. Now and then the lids parted widely and showered down these gathered shafts; and if at these times a certain rare smile divided, in harmony, her childish lips, Nora was for the moment a passable beauty. But for the most part, the best charm of her face was in a modest refinement of line, which rather evaded notice than courted it. The first impression she was likely to produce was of a kind of awkward slender majesty. Roger pronounced her "stately," and for a fortnight thought her too imposing by half; but as the days went on, and the pliable innocence of early maidenhood gave a soul to this formidable grace, he began to feel that in essentials she was still the little daughter of his charity. He even began to observe in her an added consciousness of this lowly position; as if with the growth of her mind she had come to reflect upon it, and deem it less and less a matter of course. He meditated much as to whether he should frankly talk it over with her and allow her to feel that, for him as well, their relation could never become commonplace. This would be in a measure

untender, but would it not be prudent? Ought he not, in the interest of his final purpose, to infuse into her soul in her sensitive youth an impression of all that she owed him, so that when his time had come, if her imagination should lead her a-wandering, gratitude would stay her steps? A dozen times over he was on the verge of making his point, of saying, "Nora, Nora, these are not vulgar alms; I expect a return. One of these days you must pay your debt. Guess my riddle! I love you less than you think—and more! A word to the wise." But he was silenced by a saving sense of the brutality of such a course and by a suspicion that, after all, it was not needful. A passion of gratitude was silently gathering in the young girl's heart: that heart could be trusted to keep its engagements. A deep conciliatory purpose seemed now to pervade her life, of infinite delight to Roger as little by little it stole upon his mind like the fragrance of a deepening spring. He had his idea; he suspected that she had hers. They were but opposite faces of the same deep need. Her musing silence, her deliberate smiles, the childish keenness of her questionings, the delicacy of her little nameless services and caresses, were all a kind of united acknowledgment and promise.

On Christmas eve they sat together alone by a blazing log-fire in Roger's little library. He had been reading aloud a chapter of his diary, to which Nora sat listening in dutiful demureness, though her thoughts evidently were nearer home than Cuba and Peru. There is no denying it was dull; he could gossip to better purpose. He felt its dulness himself, and closing it finally with good-humoured petulance, declared it was fit only to throw into the fire. Upon which Nora looked up, protesting. "You must do no such thing," she said. "You must keep your journals carefully, and one of these days I shall have

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them bound in morocco and gilt, and ranged in a row in my own bookcase."

"That is but a polite way of burning them up," said Roger. "They will be as little read as if they were in the fire. I don't know how it is. They seemed to be very amusing when I wrote them: they are as stale as an old newspaper now. I can't write: that's the amount of it. I am a very stupid fellow, Nora; you might as well know it first as last."

Nora's school had been of the punctilious Episcopal order, and she had learned there the pretty custom of decorating the house at Christmas-tide with garlands and crowns of evergreen and holly. She had spent the day in decking out the chimney-piece, and now, seated on a stool under the mantel-shelf, she twisted the last little wreath which was to complete her design. A great still snow-storm was falling without, and seemed to be blocking them in from the world. She bit off the thread with which she had been binding her twigs, held out her garland to admire its effect, and then, "I don't believe you are stupid, Roger," she said; "and if I did, I should not much care."

"Is that philosophy, or indifference?" said the young man.

"I don't know that it's either; it's because I know you are so good."

"That is what they say about all stupid people."

Nora added another twig to her wreath and bound it up. "I am sure," she said at last, "that when people are as good as you are, they cannot be stupid. I should like some one to tell me you are stupid. I know, Roger; I know!"

The young man began to feel a little uneasy; it was no part of his plan that her good-will should spend itself too soon. "Dear me, Nora, if you think so well of me, I shall find it hard to live up to your expectations. I am afraid I shall disappoint you. I

have a little gimcrack to put in your stocking to-night ; but I'm rather ashamed of it now."

" A gimcrack more or less is of small account. I have had my stocking hanging up these three years, and everything I possess is a present from you."

Roger frowned ; the conversation had taken just such a turn as he had often longed to provoke, but now it was disagreeable to him. " O, come," he said ; " I have done simply my duty to my little girl."

" But, Roger," said Nora, staring with expanded eyes, " I am not your little girl."

His frown darkened ; his heart began to beat. " Don't talk nonsense ! " he said.

" But, Roger, it is true. I am no one's little girl. Do you think I have no memory ? Where is my father ? Where is my mother ? "

" Listen to me," said Roger sternly. " You must not talk of such things."

" You must not forbid me, Roger. I can't think of them without thinking of you. This is Christmas eve ! Miss Murray told us that we must never let it pass without thinking of all that it means. But without Miss Murray, I have been thinking all day of things which are hard to name,—of death and life, of my parents and you, of my incredible happiness. I feel to-night like a princess in a fairy-tale. I am a poor creature, without a friend, without a penny or a home ; and yet, here I sit by a blazing fire, with money, with food, with clothes, with love. The snow outside is burying the stone walls, and yet here I can sit and simply say, ' How pretty ! ' Suppose I were in it, wandering and begging,—I might have been ! Should I think it pretty then ? Roger, Roger, I am no one's child ! " The tremor in her voice deepened, and she broke into a sudden passion of tears. Roger took her in his arms and tried to soothe away her sobs. But she disengaged herself and went on with

an almost fierce exaltation: "No, no, I won't be comforted! I have had comfort enough; I hate it. I want for an hour to be myself and feel how little that is, to be my miserable father's daughter, to fancy I hear my mother's voice. I have never spoken of them before; you must let me to-night. You must tell me about my father; you know something. I don't. You never refused me anything, Roger; don't refuse me this. He was not good, like you; but now he can do no harm. You have never mentioned his name to me, but happy as we are here together, we ought not,—we ought not, to despise him!"

Roger yielded to the vehemence of this flood of emotion. He stood watching her with two helpless tears in his own eyes, and then he drew her gently towards him and kissed her on the forehead. She took up her work again, and he told her, with every minutest detail he could recall, the story of his sole brief interview with Mr. Lambert. Gradually he lost the sense of effort and reluctance, and talked freely, abundantly, almost with pleasure. Nora listened very solemnly,—with an amount of self-control which denoted the habit of constant retrospect. She asked a hundred questions as to Roger's impression of her father's appearance. Was he not wonderfully handsome? Then taking up the tale herself, she poured out a torrent of feverish reminiscence. She disinterred her early memories with a kind of rapture of relief. Her evident joy in this frolic of confidence gave Roger a pitying sense of what her long silence must have cost her. But evidently she bore him no grudge, and his present tolerance of her rambling gossip seemed to her but another proof of his charity. She rose at last, and stood before the fire, into which she had thrown the refuse of her greenery, watching it blaze up and turn to ashes. "So much for the past!" she said at last. "The rest is the future."

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The girls at school used to be always talking about what they meant to do in coming years, what they hoped, what they wished ; wondering, choosing, imagining. You don't know how girls talk, Roger : you would be surprised ! I never used to say much : my future is fixed. I have nothing to choose, nothing to hope, nothing to fear. I am to make you happy. That's simple enough. You have undertaken to bring me up, Roger ; you must do your best, because now I am here, it's for long, and you would rather have a wise girl than a silly one." And she smiled with a kind of tentative daughterliness through the traces of her recent grief. She put her two hands on his shoulders and eyed him with conscious gravity. " You shall never repent. I shall learn everything, I shall be everything ! Oh ! I wish I were pretty." And she tossed back her head, in impatience of her fatal plainness, with an air which forced Roger to assure her that she would do very well as she was. " If you are satisfied," she said, " I am ! " For a moment Roger felt as if she were twenty years old.

This serious Christmas eve left its traces upon many ensuing weeks. Nora's education was resumed with a certain added solemnity. Roger was no longer obliged to condescend to the level of her intelligence, and he found reason to thank his stars that he had improved his own mind. He found use for all the knowledge he possessed. The day of childish " lessons " was over, and Nora sought instruction in the perusal of various classical authors, in her own and other tongues, in concert with her friend. They read aloud to each other alternately, discussed their acquisitions, and digested them with perhaps equal rapidity. Roger, in former years, had had but a small literary appetite ; he liked a few books and knew them well, but he felt as if to settle down to an unread author were very like starting on



a journey,—a case for farewells, packing trunks, and buying tickets. His curiosity, now, however, imbued and quickened with a motive, led him through a hundred untrodden paths. He found it hard sometimes to keep pace with Nora's pattering step; through the flowery lanes of poetry, in especial, she would gallop without drawing breath. Was she quicker-witted than her friend, or only more superficial? Something of one, doubtless, and something of the other. Roger was for ever suspecting her of a deeper penetration than his own, and hanging his head with an odd mixture of pride and humility. Her quick perception, at times, made him feel irretrievably dull and antiquated. His ears would tingle, his cheeks would burn, his old hope would fade into a shadow. "It's worse than useless," he would declare. "How can I ever have for her that charm of infallibility, that romance of omniscience, that a woman demands of her lover? She has seen me scratching my head, she has seen me counting on my fingers! Before she is seventeen she will be mortally tired of me, and by the time she is twenty I shall be fatally familiar and incurably stale. It's very well for her to talk about life-long devotion and eternal gratitude. She doesn't know the meaning of words. She must grow and outgrow, that is her first necessity. She must come to woman's estate and pay the inevitable tribute. I can open the door and let in the lover. If she loves me now I shall have had my turn. I can't hope to be the object of two passions. I must thank the Lord for small favours!" Then as he seemed to taste, in advance, the bitterness of disappointment, casting about him angrily for some means of appeal: "I ought to go away and stay away for years and never write at all, instead of compounding ponderous diaries to make even my absence detestable. I ought to convert myself into

a beneficent shadow, a vague tutelary name. Then I ought to come back in glory, fragrant with exotic perfumes and shod with shoes of mystery ! Otherwise, I ought to clip the wings of her fancy and put her on half-rations. I ought to snub her and scold her and bully her and tell her she's deplorably plain,—treat her as Rochester treats Jane Eyre. If I were only a good old Catholic, that I might shut her up in a convent and keep her childish and stupid and contented !” Roger felt that he was too doggedly conscientious ; but abuse his conscience as he would, he could not make it yield an inch ; so that in the constant strife between his egotistical purpose and his generous temper, the latter kept gaining ground, and Nora innocently enjoyed the spoils of victory. It was his very generosity that detained him on the spot, by her side, watching her, working for her, performing a hundred offices which other hands would have but scanted. Roger watched intently for the signs of that inevitable hour when a young girl begins to loosen her fingers in the grasp of a guiding hand and wander softly in pursuit of the sinuous silver thread which deflects, through meadows of perennial green, from the dull grey stream of the common lot. She had relapsed in the course of time into the careless gaiety and the light, immediate joys of girlhood. If she cherished a pious purpose in her heart, she made no indecent parade of it. But her very placidity and patience somehow afflicted her friend. She was-too monotonously sweet, too easily obedient. If once in a while she would only flash out into petulance or rebellion ! She kept her temper so carefully : what in the world was she keeping it for ? If she would only bless him for once with an angry look and tell him that he bored her !

During the second year after her return from school Roger began to imagine that she avoided his

society and resented his attentions. She was fond of lonely walks, readings, reveries. She was fond of novels, and she read a great many. For works of fiction in general Roger had no great relish, though he confessed to three or four old-fashioned favourites. These were not always Nora's. One evening in the early spring she sat down to a twentieth perusal of the classic tale of *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Roger, as usual, asked her to read aloud. She began, and proceeded through a dozen pages. Looking up, at this point, she beheld Roger asleep. She smiled softly, and privately resumed her reading. At the end of an hour, Roger, having finished his nap, rather startled her by his excessive annoyance at his lapse of consciousness. He wondered whether he had snored, but the absurd fellow was ashamed to ask her. Recovering himself finally, "The fact is, Nora," he said, "all novels seem to me stupid. They are nothing to what *I* can fancy! I have in my heart a prettier romance than any of them."

"A romance?" said Nora simply. "Pray let me hear it. You are quite as good a hero as this stick of a Philip. Begin!"

He stood before the fire, looking at her with almost funereal gravity. "My dénouement is not yet written," he said. "Wait till the story is finished; then you shall hear the whole."

As at this time Nora put on long dresses and began to arrange her hair as a young lady, it occurred to Roger that he might make some change in his own appearance and reinforce his waning attractions. He was now thirty-three; he fancied he was growing stout. Bald, corpulent, middle-aged,—at this rate he should soon be shelved! He was seized with a mad desire to win back the lost graces of youth. He had a dozen interviews with his tailor, the result of which was that for a fortnight he appeared daily

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in a new garment. Suddenly, amid this restless longing to revise and embellish himself, he determined to suppress his whiskers. This would take off five years. He appeared, therefore, one morning, in the severe simplicity of a moustache. Nora started, and greeted him with a little cry of horror. "Don't you like it?" he asked.

She hung her head on one side and the other. "Well, no,—to be frank."

"O, of course to be frank! It will only take five years to grow them again. What is the trouble?"

She gave a critical frown. "It makes you look too,—too fat; too much like Mr. Vose." It is sufficient to explain that Mr. Vose was the butcher, who called every day in his cart, and who recently—Roger with horror only now remembered it—had sacrificed his whiskers to a mysterious ideal.

"I am sorry!" said Roger. "It was for you I did it!"

"For me!" And Nora burst into a violent laugh.

"Why, my dear Nora," cried the young man with a certain angry vehemence, "don't I do everything in life for you?"

She became grave again. Then, after much meditation, "Excuse my unfeeling levity," she said. "You might cut off your nose, Roger, and I should like your face as well." But this was but half comfort. "Too fat!" Her subtler sense had spoken, and Roger never encountered Mr. Vose for three months after this without wishing to attack him with one of his own cleavers.

He made now an heroic attempt to scale the frowning battlements of the future. He pretended to be making arrangements for a tour in Europe, and for having his house completely remodelled in his absence; noting the while attentively the effect upon Nora of his cunning machinations. But she gave no

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sign of suspicion that his future, to the uttermost day, could be anything but her future too. One evening, nevertheless, an incident occurred which fatally confounded his calculations,—an evening of perfect mid-spring, full of warm, vague odours, of growing daylight, of the sense of bursting sap and fresh-turned earth. Roger sat on the piazza, looking out on these things with an opera-glass. Nora, who had been strolling in the garden, returned to the house and sat down on the steps of the portico. "Roger," she said, after a pause, "has it never struck you as very strange that we should be living together in this way?"

Roger's heart rose to his throat. But he was loath to concede anything, lest he should concede too much. "It is not especially strange," he said.

"Surely it *is* strange," she answered. "What are you? Neither my brother, nor my father, nor my uncle, nor my cousin,—nor even, by law, my guardian."

"By law! My dear child, what do you know about law?"

"I know that if I should run away and leave you now, you could not force me to return."

"That's fine talk! Who told you that?"

"No one; I thought of it myself. As I grow older, I ought to think of such things."

"Upon my word! Of running away and leaving me?"

"That is but one side of the question. The other is that you can turn me out of your house this moment, and no one can force you to take me back. I ought to remember such things."

"May what good will it do you to remember them?"

Nora hesitated a moment. "There is always some good in not losing sight of the truth."

"The truth! You are very young to begin to talk about the truth."

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"Not too young. I am old for my age. I ought to be!" These last words were uttered with a little sigh which roused Roger to action.

"Since we are talking about the truth," he said, "I wonder whether you know a tithe of it."

For an instant she was silent; then, rising slowly to her feet, "What do you mean?" she asked. "Is there any secret in all that you have done for me?" Suddenly she clasped her hands, and eagerly, with a smile, went on: "You said the other day you had a romance. Is it a real romance, Roger? Are you, after all, related to me,—my cousin, my brother?"

He let her stand before him, perplexed and expectant. "It is more of a romance than that."

She slid upon her knees at his feet. "Dear Roger, do tell me," she said.

He began to stroke her hair. "You think so much," he answered; "do you never think about the future, the real future, ten years hence?"

"A great deal."

"What do you think?"

She blushed a little, and then he felt that she was drawing confidence from his face. "Promise not to laugh!" she said, half laughing herself. He nodded. "I think about my husband!" she proclaimed. And then, as if she had, after all, been very absurd, and to forestall his laughter, "And about your wife!" she quickly added. "I want dreadfully to see her. Why don't you marry?"

He continued to stroke her hair in silence. At last he said sententiously, "I hope to marry one of these days."

"I wish you would do it now," Nora went on. "If only she would be nice! We should be sisters, and I should take care of the children."

"You are too young to understand what you say, or what I mean. Little girls should not talk about

marriage. It can mean nothing to you until you come yourself to marry,—as you will, of course. You will have to decide and choose."

"I suppose I shall. I shall refuse him."

"What do you mean?"

But, without answering his question, "Were you ever in love, Roger?" she suddenly asked. "Is that your romance?"

"Almost."

"Then it is not about me, after all?"

"It is about you, Nora; but, after all, it is not a romance. It is solid, it is real, it is truth itself; as true as your silly novels are false. Nora, I care for no one, I shall never care for any one, but you!"

He spoke in tones so deep and solemn that she was impressed. "Do you mean, Roger, that you care so much for me that you will never marry?"

He rose quickly in his chair, pressing his hand over his brow. "Ah, Nora," he cried, "you are very painful!"

If she had annoyed him she was very contrite. She took his two hands in her own. "Roger," she whispered gravely, "if you don't wish it, I promise never, never, never to marry, but to be yours alone,—yours alone!"

## IV

THE summer passed away ; Nora was turned sixteen. Deeming it time she should begin to see something of the world, Roger spent the autumn in travelling. Of his tour in Europe he had ceased to talk ; it was indefinitely deferred. It matters little where they went ; Nora greatly enjoyed the excursion, and found all spots alike delightful. To Roger himself it gave a great deal of comfort. Whether or no his companion was pretty, people certainly looked at her. He overheard them a dozen times call her "striking." *Striking!* The word seemed to him rich in meaning ; if he had seen her for the first time taking the breeze on the deck of a river steamer, he certainly should have been struck. On his return home he found among his letters the following missive :—

MY DEAR SIR—I have learned, after various fruitless researches, that you have adopted my cousin. Miss Lambert, at the time she left St. Louis, was too young to know much about her family, or even to care much ; and you, I suppose, have not investigated the subject. You, however, better than any one, can understand my desire to make her acquaintance. I hope you will not deny me the privilege. I am the second son of a half-sister of her mother, between whom and my own mother there was always the greatest affection. It was not until some time after it happened that I heard of Mr. Lambert's melancholy death. But it is useless to recur to that painful scene ! I resolved to spare no trouble



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in ascertaining the fate of his daughter. I have only just succeeded, after having almost given her up. I have thought it better to write to you than to her, but I beg you to give her my compliments. I anticipate no difficulty in satisfying you that I am not an impostor. I have no hope of being able to better her circumstances ; but, whatever they may be, blood is blood, and cousins are cousins, especially in the West. A speedy answer will oblige yours truly,

GEORGE FENTON.

The letter was dated in New York, from an hotel. Roger felt a certain dismay. It had been from the first a peculiar satisfaction to him that Nora began and ended so distinctly with herself. But here was a hint of indefinite continuity ! Here, at last, was an echo of her past. He immediately showed the letter to Nora. As she read it, her face flushed deep with wonder and suppressed relief. She had never heard, she confessed, of her mother's half-sister. The "great affection" between the two ladies must have been anterior to Mrs. Lambert's marriage. Roger's own provisional solution of the problem was that Mrs. Lambert had married so little to the taste of her family as to forfeit all communication with them. If he had obeyed his first impulse, he would have written to his mysterious petitioner that Miss Lambert was sensible of the honour implied in his request, but that never having missed his attentions, it seemed needless that, at this time of day, she should cultivate them. But Nora was interested in Mr. Fenton ; the dormant pulse of kinship had been quickened ; it began to throb with delicious power. This was enough for Roger. "I don't know," he said, "whether he's an honest man or a scamp, but at a venture I suppose I must invite him down." To this Nora replied that she thought his letter was "so beautiful" ; and Mr. Fenton received a fairly civil summons.

Whether or no he was an honest man remained to be seen ; but on the face of the matter he appeared no scamp. He was, in fact, a person difficult to classify. Roger had made up his mind that he would be outrageously rough and Western ; full of strange oaths and bearded, for aught he knew, like the pard. In aspect, however, Fenton was a pretty fellow enough, and his speech, if not especially conciliatory to ears polite, possessed a certain homely vigour in which ears polite might have found their account. He was as little as possible, certainly, of Roger's circle ; but he carried about him the native fragrance of another circle, beside which the social perfume familiar to Roger's nostrils might have seemed a trifle stale and insipid. He was invested with a loose-fitting cosmopolitan Occidentalism, which seemed to say to Roger that, of the two, *he* was the provincial. Considering his years,—they numbered but twenty-five,—Fenton's tough maturity was very wonderful. You would have confessed, however, that he had a true genius for his part, and that it became him better to play at manhood than at juvenility. He could never have been a ruddy-cheeked boy. He was tall and lean, with a keen dark eye, a smile humorous, but not exactly genial, a thin, drawling, almost feminine voice, and a strange South-western accent. His voice, at first, might have given you certain presumptuous hopes as to a soft spot in his stiff young hide ; but after listening awhile to its colourless monotone, you would have felt, I think, that though it was an instrument of one string, that solitary chord was not likely to become relaxed. Fenton was furthermore flat-chested and high-shouldered, though he was evidently very strong. His straight black hair was always carefully combed, and a small diamond pin adorned the bosom of his shirt. His feet were small and slender, and his left

hand was decorated with a neat specimen of tattooing. You never would have called him modest, yet you would hardly have called him impudent; for he had evidently lived with people who had not analysed appreciation to this fine point. He had nothing whatever of the manner of society, but it was surprising how gracefully a certain shrewd *bonhomie* and smart good-humour enabled him to dispense with it. He stood with his hands in his pockets, watching punctilio take its course, and thinking, probably, what a d——d fool she was to go so far roundabout to a point he could reach with a single shuffle of his long legs. Roger, from the first hour of his being in the house, felt pledged to dislike him. Fenton patronised him; he made him feel like a small boy, like an old woman; he sapped the roots of the poor fellow's comfortable consciousness of being a man of the world. Fenton was a man of twenty worlds. He had knocked about and dabbled in affairs and adventures since he was ten years old; he knew the American continent as he knew the palm of his hand; he was redolent of enterprise, of "operations," of a certain fierce friction with mankind. Roger would have liked to believe that he doubted his word, that there was a chance of his not being Nora's cousin, but a youth of an ardent swindling genius who had come into possession of a parcel of facts too provokingly pertinent to be wasted. He had evidently known the late Mr. Lambert,—the poor man must have had plenty of such friends; but was he, in truth, his wife's nephew? Had not this shadowy nepotism been excogitated over an unpaid hotel bill? So Roger fretfully meditated, but generally with no great gain of ground. He inclined, on the whole, to believe the young man's pretensions were valid, and to reserve his pugnacity for the use he might possibly make of them. Of course Fenton had not come down to

spend a stupid week in the country out of cousinly affection. Nora was but the means; Roger's presumptive wealth and bounty were the end. "He comes to make love to his cousin, and marry her if he can. I, who have done so much, will of course do more; settle an income directly on the bride, make my will in her favour, and die at my earliest convenience! How furious he must be." Roger continued to meditate, "to find me so young and hearty! How furious he would be if he knew a little more!" This line of argument was justified in a manner by the frankness of Fenton's intimation that he was incapable of any other relation to a fact than a desire to turn it to pecuniary account. Roger was uneasy, yet he took a certain comfort in the belief that, thanks to his early lessons, Nora could be trusted to confine her cousin to the limits of cousinship. In whatever he might have failed, he had certainly taught her to know a gentleman. Cousins are born, not made; but lovers may be accepted at discretion. Nora's discretion, surely, would not be wanting. I may add also that, in his desire to order all things well, Roger caught himself wondering whether, at the worst, a little precursory love-making would do any harm. The ground might be gently tickled to receive his own sowing; the petals of the young girl's nature, playfully forced apart, would leave the golden heart of the flower but the more accessible to his own vertical rays.

It was cousinship for Nora, certainly; but cousinship was much; more than Roger fancied, luckily for his peace of mind. To a girl who had never had anything to boast of, this late-coming kinsman seemed a sort of godsend. Nora was so proud of turning out to have a cousin as well as other people, that she treated Fenton much better than other people treat their cousins. It must be said that Fenton was not

altogether unworthy of her favours. He meant no especial harm to his fellow-men save in so far as he meant uncompromising benefit to himself. The Knight of La Mancha, on the torrid flats of Spain, never urged his gaunt steed with a grimmer pressure of the knees than that with which Fenton held himself erect on the hungry hobby of success. Shrewd as he was, he had perhaps, as well, a ray of Don Quixote's divine obliquity of vision. It is at least true that success as yet had been painfully elusive, and a part of the peril to Nora's girlish heart lay in this melancholy grace of undeserved failure. The young man's imagination was eager; he had a generous need of keeping too many irons on the fire. His invention was feeling rather jaded when he made overtures to Roger. He had learned six months before of his cousin's situation, and had felt no great sentimental need of making her acquaintance; but at last, revolving many things of a certain sort, he had come to wonder whether these lucky mortals could not be induced to play into his hands. Roger's wealth (which he largely overestimated) and Roger's obvious taste for sharing it with other people, Nora's innocence and Nora's prospects,—it would surely take a great fool not to pluck the rose from so thornless a tree. He foresaw these good things melting and trickling into the empty channel of his own fortune. Exactly what use he meant to make of Nora he would have been at a loss to say. Plain matrimony might or might not be a prize. At any rate, it could do a clever man no harm to have a rich girl foolishly in love with him. He turned, therefore, upon his charming cousin the softer side of his genius. He very soon began to see that he had never known so delightful a person, and indeed his growing sense of her sweetness bade fair to make him bungle his dishonesty. She was altogether sweet enough to be

valued for herself. She represented something that he had never yet encountered. Nora was a young lady ; how she had come to it was one of the outer mysteries ; but there she was, consummate ! He made no point of a man being a gentleman ; in fact, when a man was a gentleman you had rather to be one yourself, which didn't pay ; but for a woman to be a lady was plainly pure gain. He had wit enough to detect something extremely grateful in Nora's half-concessions, her reserve of freshness. Women, to him, had seemed mostly as cut flowers, blooming awhile in the waters of occasion, but yielding no second or rarer satisfaction. Nora was expanding in the sunshine of her cousin's gallantry. She had known so few young men that she had not learned to be fastidious, and Fenton represented to her fancy that great collective manhood from which Roger was excluded by his very virtues. He had an irresistible air of action, alertness, and purpose. Poor Roger held one much less in suspense. She regarded her cousin with something of the thrilled attention which one bestows on the naked arrow, poised across the bow. He had, moreover, the inestimable merit of representing her own side of her situation. He very soon became sensible of this merit, and you may be sure he entertained her to the top of her bent. He gossiped by the hour about her father, and gave her very plainly to understand that poor Mr. Lambert had been more sinned against than sinning.

Nora was not slow to perceive that Roger had no love for their guest, and she immediately conceded him his right of judgement, thinking it natural that they should quarrel about her a little. Fenton's presence was a tacit infringement of Roger's prescriptive right of property. If her cousin had only never come ! This might have been, though she could not bring herself to wish it. Nora felt vaguely that

here was a chance for tact, for the woman's peace-making art. To keep Roger in spirits, she put on a dozen unwonted graces ; she waited on him, appealed to him, smiled at him with unwearied iteration. But the main effect of these sweet offices was to make her cousin think her the prettier. Roger's rancorous suspicion transmuted to bitterness what would otherwise have been pure delight. She was turning hypocrite ; she was throwing dust in his eyes ; she was plotting with that vulgar Missourian. Fenton, of course, was forced to admit that he had reckoned without his host. Roger had had the impudence not to turn out a simpleton ; he was not a shepherd of the golden age ; he was a dogged modern, with prosy prejudices ; the wind of his favour blew as it listed. Fenton took the liberty of being extremely irritated at the other's want of ductility. " Hang the man ! " he said to himself, " why can't he trust me ? What is he afraid of ? Why don't he take me as a friend rather than an enemy ? Let him be frank, and I will be frank. I could put him up to several things. And what does he want to do with Nora, any way ? " This latter question Fenton came very soon to answer, and the answer amused him not a little. It seemed to him an extremely odd use of one's time and capital, this fashioning of a wife to order. There was a long-winded patience about it, an arrogance of leisure, which excited his ire. Roger might surely have found *his* fit ready made ! His disappointment, a certain angry impulse to break a window, as it were, in Roger's hothouse, the sense finally that what he should gain he would gain from Nora alone, though indeed she was too confoundedly innocent to appreciate his pressing necessities,—these things combined to heat the young man's humour to the fever-point, and to make him strike more random blows than belonged to plain prudence.

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The autumn being well advanced, the warmth of the sun had become very grateful. Nora used to spend much of the morning in strolling about the dismantled garden with her cousin. Roger would stand at the window with his honest face more nearly disfigured by a scowl than ever before. It was the old, old story, to his mind: nothing succeeds with women like just too little deference. Fenton would lounge along by Nora's side, with his hands in his pockets, a cigar in his mouth, his shoulders raised to his ears, and a pair of tattered slippers on his absurdly diminutive feet. Not only had Nora forgiven him this last breach of decency, but she had forthwith begun to work him a new pair of slippers. "What on earth," thought Roger, "do they find to talk about?" Their conversation, meanwhile, ran in some such strain as this.

"My dear Nora," said the young man, "what on earth, week in and week out, do you and Mr. Lawrence find to talk about?"

"A great many things, George. We have lived long enough together to have a great many subjects of conversation."

"It was a most extraordinary thing, his adopting you, if you don't mind my saying so. Imagine my adopting a little girl."

"You and Roger are very different men."

"We certainly are. What in the world did he expect to do with you?"

"Very much what he has done, I suppose. He has educated me, he has made me what I am."

"You're a very nice little person; but, upon my word, I don't see that he's to thank for it. A lovely girl can be neither made nor marred."

"Possibly! But I give you notice that I am not a lovely girl. I have it in me to be, under provocation, anything but a lovely girl. I owe everything



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to Roger. You must say nothing against him. I will not allow it. What would have become of me——" She stopped, betrayed by her glance and voice.

"Mr. Lawrence is a model of all the virtues, I admit! But, Nora, I confess I am jealous of him. Does he expect to educate you for ever? You seem to me to have already all the learning a pretty woman needs. What does *he* know about women? What does he expect to do with you two or three years hence? Two or three years hence you *will* be number one." And Fenton began to whistle with vehement gaiety, executing with shuffling feet a momentary fandango. "Two or three years hence, when you look in the glass, remember I said so!"

"He means to go to Europe one of these days," said Nora irrelevantly.

"One of these days! One would think he expects to keep you for ever. Not if I can help it. And why Europe, in the name of all that's patriotic? Europe be hanged! You ought to come out to your own section of the country, and see your own people. I can introduce you to the best society in St. Louis. I'll tell you what, my dear. You don't know it, but you're a regular Western girl."

A certain foolish gladness in being the creature thus denominated prompted Nora to a gush of momentary laughter, of which Roger, within the window, caught the soundless ripple. "You ought to know, George," she said, "you are Western enough yourself."

"Of course I am. I glory in it. It's the only place for a man of ideas! In the West you can do something! Round here you're all stuck fast in ten feet of varnish. For yourself, Nora, at bottom you're all right; but superficially you're just a trifle over-starched. But we'll take it out of you! It comes of living with a stiff-necked——"

Nora bent for a moment her lustrous eyes on the

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young man, as if to recall him to order. "I beg you to understand, once for all," she said, "that I refuse to listen to disrespectful allusions to Roger."

"I'll say it again, just to make you look at me so. If I ever fall in love with you, it will be when you are scolding me. All I have got to do is to attack your papa——"

"He is not my papa. I have had one papa; that's enough. I say it in all respect."

"If he is not your papa, what is he? He is a dog in the manger. He must be either one thing or the other. When you are very little older, you will understand that."

"He may be whatever thing you please. I shall be but one,—his best friend."

Fenton laughed with a kind of fierce hilarity. "You are so innocent, my dear, that one doesn't know where to take you. Do you expect to marry him?"

Nora stopped in the path, with her eyes on her cousin. For a moment he was half confounded by their startled severity and the flush of pain in her check. "Marry Roger!" she said, with great gravity.

"Why, he's a man, after all!"

Nora was silent a moment; and then with a certain forced levity, walking on: "I had better wait till I am asked."

"He will ask you! You will see."

"If he does, I shall be surprised."

"You will pretend to be. Women always do."

"He has known me as a child," she continued, heedless of his sarcasm. "I shall always be a child, for him."

"He will like that," said Fenton. "He will like a child of twenty."

Nora, for an instant, was lost in meditation. "As regards marriage," she said at last, quietly, "I will do what Roger wishes."

Fenton lost patience. "Roger be hanged!" he cried. "You are not his slave. You must choose for yourself and act for yourself. You must obey your own heart. You don't know what you are talking about. One of these days your heart will say its say. Then we shall see what becomes of Roger's wishes! If he wants to make what he pleases of you, he should have taken you younger,—or older! Don't tell me seriously that you can ever love (don't play upon words: love, I mean, in the one sense that means anything!) such a solemn little fop as that! Don't protest, my dear girl; I must have my say. I speak in your own interest; I speak, at any rate, from my own heart. I detest the man. I came here perfectly on the square, and he has treated me as if I weren't fit to touch with tongs. I am poor, I have my way to make, I ain't fashionable; but I'm an honest man, for all that, and as good as he, take me altogether. Why can't he show me a moment's frankness? Why can't he take me by the hand, and say, 'Come, young man, I've got capital, and you've got brains; let's pull together a stroke?' Does he think I want to steal his spoons or pick his pocket? Is that hospitality? It's a poor kind."

This passionate outbreak, prompted in about equal measure by baffled ambition and wounded conceit, made sad havoc with Nora's loyalty to her friend. Her sense of natural property in her cousin,—the instinct of free affection alternating more gratefully than she knew with the dim consciousness of measured dependence,—had become in her heart a sort of sweet excitement. It made her feel that Roger's mistrust was cruel; it was doubly cruel that George should feel it. Two angry men, at any rate, were quarrelling about her, and she must avert an explosion. She promised herself to dismiss Fenton the next day. Of course, by the very fact of this concession, Roger lost

ground with her, and George acquired the grace of the persecuted. Meanwhile, Roger's jealous irritation came to a head. On the evening following the little scene I have narrated the young couple sat by the fire in the library; Fenton on a stool at his cousin's feet holding, while Nora wound them on reels, the wools which were to be applied to the manufacture of those invidious slippers. Roger, after grimly watching their mutual amenities for some time over the cover of a book, unable to master his fierce discomposure, departed with a tell-tale stride. They heard him afterwards walking up and down the piazza, where he was appealing from his troubled nerves to the ordered quietude of the stars.

"He hates me so," said Fenton, "that I believe if I were to go out there he would draw a knife."

"O George!" cried Nora, horrified.

"It's a fact, my dear. I am afraid you'll have to give me up. I wish I had never seen you!"

"At all events, we can write to each other."

"What's writing? I don't know how to write! I will, though! I suppose he will open my letters. So much the worse for him!"

Nora, as she wound her wool, mused intently. "I can't believe he really grudges me our friendship. It must be something else."

Fenton, with a clench of his fist, arrested suddenly the outflow of the skein from his hand. "It is something else," he said. "It's our possible—more than friendship!" And he grasped her two hands in his own. "Nora, choose! Between me and him!"

She stared a moment; then her eyes filled with tears. "O George," she cried, "you make me very unhappy." She must certainly tell him to go; and yet that very movement of his which had made it doubly needful made it doubly hard. "I will talk to Roger," she said. "No one should be con-

demned unheard. We may all misunderstand each other."

Fenton, half an hour later, having, as he said, letters to write, went up to his own room; shortly after which, Roger returned to the library. Half an hour's communion with the starlight and the singing crickets had drawn the sting from his irritation. There came to him, too, a mortifying sense of his guest having outdone him in civility. This would never do. He took refuge in imperturbable good-humour, and entered the room in high indifference. But even before he had spoken, something in Nora's face caused this wholesome dose of resignation to stick in his throat. "Your cousin is gone?" he said.

"To his own room. He has some letters to write."

"Shall I hold your wools?" Roger asked, after a pause.

"Thank you. They are all wound."

"For whom are your slippers?" He knew, of course; but the question came.

"For George. Did I not tell you? Do you think them pretty?" And she held up her work.

"Prettier than he deserves."

Nora gave him a rapid glance and miscounted her stitch. "You don't like poor George," she said.

"No. Since you ask me, I don't like poor George."

Nora was silent. At last: "Well!" she said, "you've not the same reasons as I have."

"So I am bound to believe! You must have excellent reasons."

Excellent. He is my own, you know."

"Your own——? Ah!" And he gave a little laugh. •

"My own cousin," said Nora.

"Your own grandfather!" cried Roger.

She stopped her work. "What do you mean?" she asked gravely.

Roger began to blush a little. "I mean—I mean—that I don't believe in your cousin. He doesn't satisfy me. I don't like him. He contradicts himself, his story doesn't hang together. I have nothing but his word. I am not bound to take it."

"Roger, Roger," said Nora, with great softness, "do you mean that he is an impostor?"

"The word is your own. He's not an honest man."

She slowly rose from her little bench, gathering her work into the skirt of her dress. "And, doubting of his honesty, you have let him take up his abode here, you have let him become dear to me?"

She was making him ten times a fool! "Why, if you liked him," he said. "When did I ever refuse you anything?"

There came upon Nora a sudden unpitiful sense that Roger was ridiculous. "Honest or not honest," she said with vehemence, "I *do* like him. Cousin or no cousin, he is my friend."

"Very good. But I warn you. I don't enjoy talking to you thus. Only let me tell you, once for all, that your cousin, your friend—your—whatever he is!——" He faltered an instant; Nora's eyes were fixed on him. "That he disgusts me!"

"You are extremely unjust. You have taken no trouble to know him. You have treated him from the first with small civility!"

"Was the trouble to be all mine? Civility! he never missed it; he doesn't know what it means."

"He knows more than you think. But we must talk no more about him." She rolled together her canvas and reels; and then suddenly, with passionate inconsequence, "Poor, poor George!" she cried.

Roger watched her a moment; then he said bitterly, "You disappoint me."

"You must have formed great hopes of me!" she answered.

"I confess I had."

"Say good-bye to them then, Roger. If this is wrong, I am all wrong!" She spoke with a proud decision, which was very becoming; she had never yet come so near being beautiful. In the midst of his passionate vexation Roger admired her. The scene seemed for a moment a bad dream, from which, with a start, he might wake up to tell her he loved her.

"Your anger gives an admirable point to your remarks. Indeed, it gives a beauty to your face. Must a young lady be in the wrong to be attractive?" he went on, hardly knowing what he said. But a burning blush in her cheeks recalled him to a kind of self-aborrence. "Would to God," he cried, "your abominable cousin had never come between us!"

"Between us? He is not between us. I stand as near you, Roger, as I ever did. Of course George will go away immediately."

"Of course! I am not so sure. He will, I suppose, if he is asked."

"Of course I shall ask him."

"Nonsense. You will not enjoy that."

"We are old friends by this time," said Nora, with terrible irony. "I shall not in the least mind."

Roger could have choked himself. He had brought his case to this: Fenton a martyred proscrip<sup>t</sup>, and Nora a brooding victim of duty. "Do I want to turn the man out of the house?" he cried. "Do me a favour—I insist upon it. Say nothing to him, let him stay as long as he chooses. I am not afraid! I don't trust him, but I trust you. I am curious to see how long he will have the impudence to stay. A fortnight hence I shall be justified. You will say to me, 'Roger, you were right. George is not a gentleman.' There! I insist."

"A gentleman? Really, what are we talking about? Do you mean that he wears a false diamond in his shirt? He will take it off if I ask him. There's a long way between wearing false diamonds——"

"And stealing real ones! I don't know. I have always fancied they go together. At all events, Nora, he is not to suspect that he has been able to make trouble between two old friends."

Nora stood for a moment in irresponsible meditation. "I think he means to go," she said. "If you want him to stay, you must ask him." And without further words she marched out of the room. Roger followed her with his eyes. He thought of Lady Castlewood in *Henry Esmond*, who looked "devilish handsome in a passion."

Lady Castlewood, meanwhile, ascended to her own room, flung her work upon the floor, and, dropping into a chair, betook herself to weeping. It was late before she slept. She awoke with a new consciousness of the burden of life. Her own burden certainly was small, but her strength, as yet, was untested. She had thought, in her many reveries, of a possible disagreement with Roger, and prayed that it might never come by a fault of hers. The fault was hers now in that she had surely cared less for duty than for joy. Roger, indeed, had shown a pitiful smallness of view. This was a weakness; but who was she, to keep account of Roger's weaknesses? It was to a weakness of Roger's that she owed her food and raiment and shelter. It helped to quench her resentment that she felt, somehow, that, whether Roger smiled or frowned, George would still be George. He was not a gentleman: well and good; neither was she, for that matter, a lady. But a certain manful hardness like George's would not be amiss in the man one was to love.

A simpler soul than Fenton's might have guessed



at the trouble of this quiet household. Fenton read in it as well an omen of needful departure. He accepted the necessity with an acute sense of failure, —almost of injury. He had gained nothing but the bother of being loved. It was a bother, because it gave him an unwonted sense of responsibility. It seemed to fling upon all things a dusky shade of prohibition. Yet the matter had its brightness, too, if a man could but swallow his superstitions. He cared for Nora quite enough to tell her he loved her ; he had said as much, with an easy conscience, to girls for whom he cared far less. He felt gratefully enough the cool vestment of tenderness which she had spun about him, like a web of imponderable silver ; but he had other uses for his time than to go masquerading through Nora's fancy. The defeat of his hope that Roger, like a testy old uncle in a comedy, would shower blessings and bank-notes upon his union with his cousin, involved the discomfiture of a secondary project ; the design, namely, of borrowing five thousand dollars. The reader will smile ; but such is the simplicity of " smart men." He would content himself now with five hundred. In this collapse of his visions he fell a-musing upon Nora's financial value.

" Look here," he said to her, with an air of heroic effort, " I see I'm in the way. I must be off."

" I am sorry, George," said Nora, sadly.

" So am I. I never supposed I was proud. But I reckoned without my host ! " he said with a bitter laugh. " I wish I had never come. Or rather I don't. It is worth it all to know you."

She began to question him soothingly about his projects and prospects ; and hereupon, for once, Fenton bent his mettle to simulate a pathetic incapacity. He set forth that he was discouraged ; the future was a blank. It was child's play, attempting to do anything without capital.

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"And you have no capital?" said Nora, anxiously. Fenton gave a poignant smile. "Why, my dear girl, I'm a poor man!"

"How poor?"

"Poor, poor, poor. Poor as a rat."

"You don't mean that you are penniless?"

"What is the use of my telling you? You can't help me. And it would only make you unhappy."

"If you are unhappy, I want to be!"

This golden vein of sentiment might certainly be worked. Fenton took out his pocket-book, drew from it four bank-notes of five dollars each, and ranged them with a sort of mournful playfulness in a line on his knee. "That's my fortune."

"Do you mean to say that twenty dollars is all you have in the world?"

Fenton smoothed out the creases, caressingly, in the soiled and crumpled notes. "It's a great shame to bring you down to a poor man's secrets," he said. "Fortune has raised you above them."

Nora's heart began to beat. "Yes, it has. I have a little money, George. Some eighty dollars."

Eighty dollars! George suppressed a groan. "He keeps you rather low."

"Why, I have very little use for money, and no chance, here in the country, to spend it. Roger is extremely generous. Every few weeks he makes me take some. I often give it away to the poor people hereabouts. Only a fortnight ago I refused to take any more on account of my still having this. It's agreed between us that I may give what I please in charity, and that my charities are my own affair. If I had only known of you, George, I should have appointed you my pensioner-in-chief."

George was silent. He was wondering intently how he might arrange to become the standing recipient of her overflow. Suddenly he remembered that he ought

to protest. But Nora had lightly quitted the room. Fenton repocketed his twenty dollars and awaited her reappearance. Eighty dollars were not a fortune; still they were eighty dollars. To his great annoyance, before Nora returned Roger presented himself. The young man felt for an instant as if he had been caught in an act of sentimental burglary, and made a movement to conciliate his detector. "I am afraid I must bid you good-bye," he said.

Roger frowned, and wondered whether Nora had spoken. At this moment she reappeared, flushed and out of breath with the excitement of her purpose. She had been counting over her money, and held in each hand a little fluttering package of bank-notes. On seeing Roger she stopped and blushed, exchanging with her cousin a rapid glance of inquiry. He almost glared at her, whether with warning or with menace she hardly knew. Roger stood looking at her, half amazed. Suddenly, as the meaning of her errand flashed upon him, he turned a furious crimson. He made a step forward, but cautioned himself; then, folding his arms, he silently waited. Nora, after a moment's hesitation, rolling her notes together, came up to her cousin and held out the little package. Fenton kept his hands in his pockets and devoured her with his eyes. "What's all this?" he said brutally.

"O George!" cried Nora; and her eyes filled with tears.

Roger had divined the situation; the shabby victimisation of the young girl and her kinsman's fury at the disclosure of his avidity. He was angry; but he was even more disgusted. From so vulgar a knave there was little rivalry to fear. "I am afraid I am rather a marplot," he said. "Don't insist, Nora. Wait till my back is turned."

"I have nothing to be ashamed of," said Nora.

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"*You?* O, nothing whatever!" cried Roger with a laugh.

Fenton stood leaning against the mantelpiece, desperately sullen, with a look of vicious confusion. "It is only I who have anything to be ashamed of," he said at last, bitterly, with an effort. "My poverty!"

Roger smiled graciously. "Honest poverty is never shameful!"

Fenton gave him an insolent stare. "Honest poverty! You know a great deal about it."

"Don't appeal to poor little Nora, man, for her savings," Roger went on. "Come to me."

"You are unjust," said Nora. "He didn't appeal to me. I appealed to him. I guessed his poverty. He has only twenty dollars in the world."

"O you poor little fool!" roared Fenton's eyes.

Roger was delighted. At a single stroke he might redeem his incivility and reinstate himself in Nora's affections. He took out his pocket-book. "Let me help you. It was very stupid of me not to have guessed your embarrassment." And he counted out a dozen notes.

Nora stepped to her cousin's side and passed her hand through his arm. "Don't be proud," she murmured caressingly.

Roger's notes were new and crisp. Fenton looked hard at the opposite wall, but, explain it who can, he read their successive figures,—a fifty, four twenties, six tens. He could have howled.

"Come, don't be proud," repeated Roger, holding out this little bundle of wealth.

Two great passionate tears welled into the young man's eyes. The sight of Roger's sturdy sleekness, of the comfortable twinkle of patronage in his eye, was too much for him. "I shall not give *you* a

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chance to be proud," he said. "Take care! Your papers may go into the fire."

"O George!" murmured Nora; and her murmur seemed to him delicious.

He bent down his head, passed his arm round her shoulders, and kissed her on her forehead. "Good-bye, dearest Nora," he said.

Roger stood staring, with his proffered gift. "You decline?" he cried, almost defiantly.

"'Decline' is not the word. A man does not decline an insult."

Was Fenton, then, to have the best of it, and was his own very generosity to be turned against him? Blindly, passionately, Roger crumpled the notes into his fist and tossed them into the fire. In an instant they began to blaze.

"Roger, are you mad?" cried Nora. And she made a movement to rescue the crackling paper. Fenton burst into a laugh. He caught her by the arm, clasped her round the waist, and forced her to stand and watch the brief blaze. Pressed against his side, she felt the quick beating of his heart. As the notes disappeared her eyes sought Roger's face. He looked at her stupidly, and then turning on his heel he walked out of the room. Her cousin, still holding her, showered upon her forehead half-a-dozen fierce kisses. But disengaging herself—"You must leave the house!" she cried. "Something dreadful will happen."

Fenton had soon packed his valise, and Nora, meanwhile, had ordered a vehicle to carry him to the station. She waited for him in the portico. When he came out, with his bag in his hand, she offered him again her little roll of bills. But he was a wiser man than half an hour before. He took them, turned them over, and selected a one-dollar note. "I will keep this," he said, "in remembrance, and only spend

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it for my last dinner." She made him promise, however, that if trouble really overtook him, he would let her know, and in any case he would write. As the wagon went over the crest of an adjoining hill he stood up and waved his hat. His tall, gaunt young figure, as it rose dark against the cold November sunset, cast a cooling shadow across the fount of her virgin sympathies. Such was the outline, surely, of the conquering hero, not of the conquered. Her fancy followed him forth into the world with a sense of comradeship.

## V

ROGER's quarrel with his young companion, if quarrel it was, was never repaired. It had scattered its seed ; they were left lying, to be absorbed in the conscious soil or dispersed by some benignant breeze of accident, as destiny might appoint. But as a manner of clearing the air of its thunder, Roger, a week after Fenton's departure, proposed she should go with him for a fortnight to town. Later, perhaps, they might arrange to remain for the winter. Nora had been longing vaguely for the relief of a change of circumstances ; she assented with great good-will. They lodged at an hotel,—not the establishment at which they had made acquaintance. Here, late in the afternoon, the day after their arrival, Nora sat by the window, waiting for Roger to come and take her to dinner, and watching with the intentness of country eyes the hurrying throng in the street ; thinking too at moments of a certain blue bonnet she had bought that morning, and comparing it, not uncomplacently, with the transitory bonnets on the pavement. A gentleman was introduced ; Nora had not forgotten Hubert Lawrence. Hubert had occupied for more than a year past a pastoral office in the West, and had recently had little communication with his cousin. Nora he had seen but on a single occasion, that of his visit to Roger, six months after her advent. She had grown in the interval, from the little girl

who slept with *The Child's Own Book* under her pillow and dreamed of the Prince Avenant, into a lofty maiden who reperused *The Heir of Redclyffe*, and mused upon the loves of the clergy. Hubert, too, had changed in his own degree. He was now thirty-one years of age, and his character had lost something of a certain boyish vagueness of outline, which formerly had not been without its grace. But his elder grace was scarcely less effective. Various possible half-shadows in his personality had melted into broad, shallow lights. He was now, distinctly, one of the light-armed troops of the army of the Lord. He fought the Devil as an irresponsible skirmisher, not as a sturdy gunsman planted beside a booming sixty-pounder. The clerical cloth, as Hubert wore it, was not unmitigated sable; and in spite of his cloth, such as it was, humanity rather than divinity got the lion's share of his attentions. He loved doubtless, in this world, the heavenward face of things, but he loved, as regards heaven, the earthward. He was rather an idler in the walks of theology, and he was uncommitted to any very rigid convictions. He thought the old theological positions in very bad taste, but he thought the new theological negations in no taste at all. In fact, Hubert believed so vaguely and languidly in the Devil that there was but slender logic in his having undertaken the cure of souls. He administered his spiritual medicines in homœopathic doses. It had been maliciously said that he had turned parson because parsons enjoy peculiar advantages in approaching the fair sex. The presumption is in their favour. Our business, however, is not to pick up idle reports. Hubert was, on the whole, a decidedly light weight, and yet his want of spiritual passion was by no means, in effect, a want of motive or stimulus; for the central pivot of his being continued to operate with the most noiseless precision



and regularity,—the slim, erect, inflexible *Ego*. To the eyes of men, and especially to the eyes of women, whatever may have been the moving cause, the outer manifestation was very agreeable. If Hubert had no great firmness of faith, he had a very pretty firmness of manner. He was gentle without timidity, frank without arrogance, clever without pedantry. The common measure of clerical disallowance was reduced in his hands to the tacit protest of a generous personal purity. His appearance bore various wholesome traces of the practical lessons of his Western pastorate. This had not been to his taste ; he had had to apply himself, to devote himself, to compromise with a hundred aversions. His talents had been worth less to him than he expected, and he had been obliged, as the French say, to *payer de sa personne*,—that person for which he entertained so delicate a respect. All this had given him a slightly jaded, overwearied look, certain to deepen his interest in feminine eyes. He had actually a couple of fine wrinkles in his seraphic forehead. He secretly rejoiced in his wrinkles. They were his crown of glory. He had suffered, he had worked, he had been bored. Now he believed in earthly compensations.

"Dear me!" he said, "can this be Nora Lambert?"

She had risen to meet him, and held out her hand with girlish frankness. She was dressed in a light silk dress ; she seemed a young woman grown. "I have been growing hard in all these years," she said. "I have had to catch up with those *pieds énormes*." The readers will not have forgotten that Hubert had thus qualified her lower members. Ignorant as she was, at the moment, of the French tongue, her memory had instinctively retained the words, and she had taken an early opportunity to look out *pied* in the dictionary. *Enorme*, of course, spoke for itself.

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"You must have caught up with them now," Hubert said, laughing. "You are an enormous young lady. I should never have known you." He sat down, asked various questions about Roger, and adjured her to tell him, as he said, "all about herself." The invitation was flattering, but it met only a partial compliance. Unconscious as yet of her own charm, Nora was oppressed by a secret admiration of her companion, whose presence seemed to open a brilliant vista. She compared him with her cousin, and wondered that he should be at once so impressive and so different. She blushed a little, privately, for Fenton, and was not ill pleased to think he was absent. In the light of Hubert's good manners, his admission that he was no gentleman acquired an excessive force. By this thrilling intimation of the diversity of the male sex, the mental pinafore of childhood seemed finally dismissed. Hubert was so frank and friendly, so tenderly and gallantly patronising, that more than once she felt herself beginning to expand; but then, suddenly, something absent in the tone of his assent, a vague fancy that, in the gathering dusk, he was looking at her all at his ease, rather than listening to her, converted her bravery into what she knew to be deplorable little-girlishness. On the whole, this interview may have passed for Nora's first lesson in the art, indispensable to a young lady on the threshold of society, of talking for half an hour without saying anything. The lesson was interrupted by the arrival of Roger, who greeted his cousin with almost extravagant warmth, and insisted upon his staying to dinner. Roger was to take Nora after dinner to a concert, for which he felt no great enthusiasm; he proposed to Hubert, who was a musical man, to occupy his place. Hubert demurred awhile; but in the meantime Nora, having gone to prepare herself, reappeared, looking extremely well in the blue crape

bonnet before mentioned, with her face bright with anticipated pleasure. For a moment Roger was vexed at having resigned his office ; Hubert immediately stepped into it. They came home late, the blue bonnet nothing the worse for wear, and the young girl's face lighted up by her impressions. Her animation was extreme ; she treated Roger to a representation of the concert, and made a great show of voice. Her departing childishness, her dawning tact, her freedom with Roger, her half-freedom with Hubert, made a charming mixture, and insured for her auditors the success of the entertainment. When she had retired, amid a mimic storm of applause from the two gentlemen, Roger solemnly addressed his cousin. " Well, what do you think of her ? I hope you have no fault to find with her feet."

" I have had no observation of her feet," said Hubert ; " but she will have very handsome hands. She is a very nice creature." Roger sat lounging in his chair with his hands in his pockets, his chin on his breast, and a heavy gaze fixed on Hubert. The latter was struck with his deeply preoccupied aspect. " But let us talk of you rather than of Nora," he said. " I have been waiting for a chance to tell you that you look very poorly."

" Nora or I,—it's all one. She is the only thing in life I care for."

Hubert was startled by the sombre energy of his tone. The old polished, placid Roger was in abeyance. " My dear fellow," he said, " you are altogether wrong. Live for yourself. You may be sure she will do as much. You take it too hard."

" Yes, I take it too hard. It troubles me."

" What's the matter ? Is she a naughty child ? Is she more than you bargained for ? " Roger sat gazing at him in silence, with the same grave eye. He began to suspect Nora had turned out a losing

investment. "Has she—a—low tastes?" he went on. "Surely not with that sweet face!"

Roger started to his feet impatiently. "Don't misunderstand me!" he cried. "I have been longing to see some one,—to talk,—to get some advice,—some sympathy. I am fretting myself away."

"Good heavens, man, give her a thousand dollars and send her back to her family. You have educated her."

"Her family! She has no family! She's the loneliest as well as the sweetest, wisest, best of creatures! If she were only a tenth as good, I should be a happier man. I can't think of parting with her; not for all I possess."

Hubert stared a moment. "Why, you are in love."

"Yes," said Roger, blushing. "I am in love."

"Dear me!" murmured Hubert.

"I am not ashamed of it," rejoined Roger, softly.

It was no business of Hubert's, certainly; but he felt the least bit disappointed. "Well," he said coolly, "why don't you marry her?"

"It is not so simple as that!"

"She will not have you?"

Roger frowned impatiently. "Reflect a moment. You pretend to be a man of delicacy."

"You mean she is too young? Nonsense. If you are sure of her, the younger the better."

"For my unutterable misery," said Roger, "I have a conscience. I wish to leave her free and take the risk. I wish to be just and let the matter work itself out. You may think me absurd, but I wish to be loved for myself, as other men are loved."

It was a specialty of Hubert's that in proportion as other people grew hot, he grew cool. To keep cool, morally, in a heated medium was, in fact, for Hubert a peculiar satisfaction. He broke into a long

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light laugh. "Excuse me," he said, "but there is something ludicrous in your attitude. What business has a lover with a conscience? None at all! That's why I keep out of it. It seems to me your prerogative to be downright. If you waste any more time in hair-splitting, you will find your young lady has taken things in the lump!"

"Do you really think there is danger?" Roger demanded, pitifully. "Not yet awhile. ~~She's~~ only a child. Tell me, rather, ~~is~~ she only a child? You have spent the evening beside her: how does she strike a stranger?"

While Hubert's answer lingered on his lips, the door opened and Nora came in. Her errand was to demand the use of Roger's watch-key, her own having mysteriously vanished. She had begun to take out her pins and had muffled herself for this excursion in a merino dressing-gown of sombre blue. Her hair was gathered for the night into a single massive coil, which had been loosened by the rapidity of her flight along the passage. Roger's key proved a complete misfit, so that she had recourse to Hubert's. It hung on the watch-chain which depended from his waistcoat, and some rather intimate fumbling was needed to adjust it to Nora's diminutive timepiece. It worked admirably, and she stood looking at him with a little smile of caution as it creaked on the pivot. "I would not have troubled you," she said, "but that, without my watch I should oversleep myself. You know Roger's temper, and what I should suffer if I were late for breakfast!"

Roger was ravished at this humorous sally, and when, on making her escape, she clasped one hand to her head to support her released tresses, and hurried along the corridor with the other confining the skirts of her inflated robe, he kissed his hand after her with more than jocular good-will.

" Ah ! it's as bad as that ! " said Hubert, shaking his head.

" I had no idea she had such hair," murmured Roger. " You are right, it is no case for shilly-shallying."

" Take care ! " said Hubert. " She is only a child."

Roger looked at him a moment. " My dear fellow, you are a hypocrite."

Hubert coloured the least bit, and then took up his hat and began to smooth it with his handkerchief. " Not at all. See how frank I can be. I recommend you to marry the young lady and have done with it. If you wait, it will be at your own risk. I assure you I think she is charming, and if I am not mistaken, this is only a hint of future possibilities. Don't sow for others to reap. If you think the harvest is not ripe, let it ripen in milder sunbeams than these vigorous hand-kisses. Lodge her with some proper person and go to Europe ; come home from Paris a year hence with her trousseau in your trunks, and I will perform the ceremony without another fee than the prospect of having an adorable cousin." With these words Hubert left his companion pensive.

His words reverberated in Roger's mind ; I may almost say that they rankled. A couple of days later, in the hope of tenderer counsel, he called upon our friend Mrs. Keith. This lady had completely rounded the cape of matrimony, and was now buoyantly at anchor in the placid cove of well-dowered widowhood. You have heard many a young unmarried lady exclaim with a bold sweep of conception, " Ah me ! I wish I were a widow ! " Mrs. Keith was precisely the widow that young unmarried ladies wish to be. With her diamonds in her dressing-case and her carriage in her stable, and without a feather's weight of encumbrance, she offered a finished example of satisfied ambition. Her wants had been definite ; these once gratified,

she had not presumed further. She was a very much worthier woman than in those hungry virginal days when Roger had wooed her. Prosperity had agreed equally well with her beauty and her temper. The wrinkles on her brow had stood still, like Joshua's sun, and a host of good intentions and fair promises seemed to illuminate her person. Roger, as he stood before her, not only felt that his passion was incurably defunct, but allowed himself to doubt that this *veuve consolée* would have made an ideal wife. The lady, mistaking his embarrassment for the fumes of smouldering ardour, determined to transmute his devotion by the subtle chemistry of friendship. This she found easy work ; in ten minutes the echoes of the past were hushed in the small-talk of the present. Mrs. Keith was on the point of sailing for Europe, and had much to say of her plans and arrangements,—of the miserable rent she was to get for her house. "Why shouldn't one turn an honest penny?" she asked. "And now," she went on, when the field had been cleared, "tell me about the young lady." This was precisely what Roger wished ; but just as he was about to begin his story there came an irruption of visitors, fatal to the confidential. Mrs. Keith found means to take him aside. "Seeing is better than hearing," she said, "and I am dying to see her. Bring her this evening to dinner, and we shall have her to ourselves."

Mrs. Keith had long been for Nora an object of mystical veneration. Roger had been in the habit of alluding to her, not freely nor frequently, but with a certain implicit consideration which more than once had set Nora wondering. She entered the lady's drawing-room that evening with an oppressive desire to please. The interest manifested by Roger in the question of what she should wear assured her that he had staked a nameless something on the impression

she might make. She was not only reassured, however, but altogether captivated, by the lavish cordiality of her hostess. Mrs. Keith kissed her on both cheeks, held her at her two arms' length, gave a twist to the fall of her sash, and made her feel very plainly that she was being inspected and appraised. All this was done, however, with a certain flattering light in the eye and a tender matronly smile which rather increased than diminished the young girl's composure. Mrs. Keith was herself so elegant, so finished, so fragrant of taste and sense, that before an hour was over Nora felt that she had borrowed the hint of a dozen indispensable graces. After dinner her hostess bade her sit down to the piano. Here, feeling sure of her ground, Nora surpassed herself. Mrs. Keith beckoned to Roger to come and sit beside her on the sofa, where, as she nodded time to the music with her head, she softly conversed. Prosperity, as I have intimated, had acted on her moral nature very much as a medicinal tonic—quinine or iron—acts upon the physical. She was in a comfortable glow of charity. She itched gently, she hardly knew where,—was it in heart or brain?—to render some one a service. She had on hand a small capital of sentimental patronage for which she desired a secure investment. Here was her chance. The project which Roger had imparted to her three years before seemed to her, now she had taken Nora's measure, to contain such pretty elements of success that she deemed it a sovereign pity it should not be rounded into symmetry. She determined to lend an artistic hand. "Does she know it, that matter?" she asked in a whisper.

"I have never told her."

"That's right. I approve your delicacy. Of course you are sure of your case. She is altogether lovely,—she is one in a thousand. I really envy you; upon



my word, Mr. Lawrence, I am jealous. She has a style of her own. It is not quite beauty ; it is not quite cleverness. It belongs neither altogether to her person, nor yet to her mind. It's a kind of way she has. It's a way that may lead her far. She has pretty things, too ; one of these days she may take it into her head to be a beauty of beauties. Nature never meant her to hold up her head so well for nothing. Ah, how wrinkled and faded it makes one feel ! To be sixteen years old, with ~~that~~ head of hair, with health and good connexions, with that amount of good-will at the piano, it's the very best thing in the world, if they but knew it ! But no ! they must leave it all behind them ; they must pull their hair to pieces ; they must get rid of their complexions ; they must be twenty ; they must have lovers, and go their own gait. Well, since it must come, we must attend to the profits : they will take care of ~~the~~ pleasures. Give Nora to me for a year. She needs a woman, a wise woman, a woman like me. Men, when they undertake to meddle with a young girl's education, are veriest old grandmothers. Let me take her to Europe and bring her out in Rome. Don't be afraid ; I ~~will~~ guard your interests. I will bring you back the most charming girl in America. I see her from here ! " And describing a great curve in the air with her fan, Mrs. Keith inclined her head to one side in a manner suggestive of a milliner who describes in the bosom of futurity the ideal bonnet. Looking at Roger, she saw that her point was gained ; and Nora, having just finished her piece, was accordingly summoned to the sofa and made to sit down at Mrs. Keith's feet. Roger went and stood before the fire. " My dear Nora," said Mrs. Keith, as if she had known her from childhood, " how should you like to go with me to Rome ? "

Nora started to her feet, and stood looking open-

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eyed from one to the other. "Really?" she said. "Does Roger——"

"Roger," said Mrs. Keith, "finds you so hard to manage that he has made you over to me. I forewarn you, I am a terrible woman. But if you are not afraid, I shall scold you and pinch you no harder than I would a daughter of my own."

"I give you up for a year," said Roger. "It is hard, troublesome as you are."

Nora stood wavering for a moment, hesitating where to deposit her excess of joy. Then graciously dropping on her knees before Mrs. Keith, she bent her young head and got rid of it in an ample kiss. "I am not afraid of you," she said simply. Roger turned round and began to poke the fire.

The next day Nora went forth to buy certain articles necessary in travelling. It was raining so heavily that, at Roger's direction, she took a carriage. Coming out of a shop, in the course of her expedition, she encountered Hubert Lawrence tramping along in the wet. He helped her back to her carriage, and stood for a moment talking to her through the window. As they were going in the same direction, she invited him to get in; and on his hesitating, she added that she hoped their interview was not to end there, as she was going to Europe with Mrs. Keith. At this news Hubert jumped in and placed himself on the front seat. The knowledge that she was drifting away gave a sudden value to the present occasion. Add to this that in the light of Roger's revelation after the concert, this passive, predestined figure of hers had acquired for the young man a certain picturesque interest. Nora found herself strangely at ease with her companion. From time to time she strove to check her happy freedom: but Hubert evidently, with his superior urbanity, was not the person to note a little more or less in a school-girl's

primness. Her enjoyment of his presence, her elation in the prospect of departure, made her gaiety reckless. They went together to half-a-dozen shops and talked and laughed so distractedly over her purchases, that she made them sadly at haphazard. At last their progress was arrested by a dead-lock of vehicles in front of them, caused by the breaking down of a street-car. The carriage drew up near the sidewalk in front of a confectioner's. On Nora's regretting the delay, and saying she was ravenous for lunch, Hubert went into the shop, and returned with a bundle of tarts. The rain came down in sheeted torrents, so that they had to close both the windows. Circled about with this watery screen, they feasted on their tarts with peculiar relish. In a short time Hubert made another excursion, and returned with a second course. His diving to and fro in the rain excited them to extravagant mirth. Nora had bought some pocket-handkerchiefs, which were in that cohesive state common to these articles in the shop. It seemed a very pretty joke to spread the piece across their knees as a table-cloth.

"To think of picnicking in the midst of Washington Street!" cried Nora, with her lips besprinkled with flakes of pastry.

"For a young lady about to leave her native land, her home, and friends, and all that is dear to her," said Hubert, "you seem to me in very good spirits."

"Don't speak of it," said Nora. "I shall cry to-night; it is feverish gaiety."

"You will not be able to do this kind of thing abroad," said Hubert. "Do you know we are monstrously improper? For a young girl it's by no means pure gain, going to Europe. She comes into a very pretty heritage of prohibitions. You have no idea of the number of improper things a young girl can do. You are walking on the edge of a precipice.

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Don't look over or you will lose your head and never walk straight again. Here, you are all blindfold. Promise me not to lose this blessed bandage of American innocence. Promise me that, when you come back, we shall spend another morning together as free and delightful as this one ! ”

“ I promise you ! ” said Nora ; but Hubert's words had potently foreshadowed the forfeiture of sweet possibilities. For the rest of the drive she was in a graver mood. They found Roger beneath the portico of the hotel, watch in hand, staring up and down the street. Preceding events having been explained to him, he offered to drive his cousin home.

“ I suppose Nora has told you,” he began, as they proceeded.

“ Yes ! Well, I am sorry. She is a charming girl.”

“ Ah ! ” Roger cried ; “ I knew you thought so ! ”

“ You are as knowing as ever ! She sails, she tells me, on Wednesday next. And you, when do you sail ? ”

“ I don't sail at all. I am going home.”

“ Are you sure of that ? ”

Roger gazed for a moment out of the window. “ I mean for a year,” he said, “ to allow her perfect liberty.”

“ And to accept the consequences ? ”

“ Absolutely.” And Roger folded his arms.

This conversation took place on a Friday. Nora was to sail from New York on the succeeding Wednesday ; for which purpose she was to leave Boston with Mrs. Keith on the Monday. The two ladies were of course to be attended to the ship by Roger. Early Sunday morning Nora received a visit from her friend. The reader will perhaps remember that Mrs. Keith was a recent convert to the Roman Catholic faith ; as such, she performed her religious duties with peculiar assiduity. Her present errand was to propose

that Nora should go with her to church and join in offering a mass for their safety at sea. "I don't want to bring you over, you know; but I think it would be so nice," said Mrs. Keith. Appealing to Roger, Nora received permission to do as she chose; she therefore lent herself with fervour to this pious enterprise. The two ladies spent an hour at the foot of the altar,—an hour of romantic delight to the younger one. On Sunday evening Roger, who, as the day of separation approached, became painfully anxious and reluctant, betook himself to Mrs. Keith, with the desire to enforce upon her mind a solemn sense of her responsibilities and of the value of the treasure he had confided to her. Nora, left alone, sat wondering whether Hubert might not come to bid her farewell. Wandering listlessly about the room, her eye fell on the Saturday evening paper. She took it up and glanced down the columns. In one of them she perceived a list of the various church services of the morrow. Last in the line stood this announcement: "At the ——— Church, the Rev. Hubert Lawrence, at eight o'clock." It gave her a gentle shock; it destroyed the vision of his coming in and their having, under the lamp, by the fire, the serious counterpart of their frolicsome *tête-à-tête* in the carriage. She longed to show him that she was not a giggling child, but a wise young lady. But no; in a dimly-crowded church, before a hundred eyes, he was speaking of divine things. How did he look in the pulpit? If she could only see him! And why not? She looked at her watch; it lacked ten minutes to eight. She made no pause to reflect; she only felt that she must hurry. She rang the bell and ordered a carriage, and then, hastening to her room, put on her shawl and bonnet,—the blue crape bonnet of the concert. In a few moments she was on her way to the church. When she reached it, her heart was beating fast;

she was on the point of turning back. But the coachman opened the carriage door with such a flourish that she was ashamed not to get out. She was late ; the church was full, the service had gone forward, the sermon was about to begin. The sexton with great solemnity conducted her up the aisle to a pew directly beneath the pulpit. She bent her eyes on the ground, but she knew that there was a deep expectant silence, and that Hubert was upright before the desk looking at her. She sat down beside a very grim-visaged old lady with bushy eyebrows, who stared at her so hard, that to hide her confusion she buried her head and prolonged her prayer ; upon which the old lady seemed to stare more intently, as if she thought her very pretentious. When she raised her head, Hubert had begun to speak ; he was looking above her and beyond her, and during the sermon his level glance never met her own. Of what did he speak and what was the moral of his discourse ? Nora could not have told you ; yet not a soul in the audience, not all those listening souls together, were more devoutly attentive than she. But it was not on what he said, but on what he was, or seemed to be, that her perception was centred. Hubert Lawrence had an excellent gift of oratory. His voice was full of penetrating sweetness, and, modulated with infinite art, it sank with a silvery cadence. His speech was silver, though I doubt whether his silence was ever golden. His utterance seemed to Nora the perfection of eloquence. She thought of her uplifted feeling in the morning, in the incense-thickened air of the Catholic church ; but what a straighter flight to heaven was this ! Hubert's week-day face was a summer cloud, with a lining of celestial brightness. Now, how the divine truth overlapped its relenting edges and seemed to transform it into a dazzling focus of light ! He spoke for half an hour, but Nora

took no note of time. As the service drew to a close, he gave her from the pulpit a rapid glance, which she interpreted as a request to remain. When the congregation began to disperse, a number of persons, chiefly ladies, waited for him near the pulpit, and, as he came down, met him with greetings and compliments. Nora watched him from her place, listening, smiling, and passing his handkerchief over his forehead. At last they released him, and he came up to her. She remembered for years afterward the strange half-smile on his face. There was something in it like a pair of eyes peeping over a wall. It seemed to express so fine an acquiescence in what she had done, that, for the moment, she had a startled sense of having committed herself to something. He gave her his hand, without manifesting any surprise. "How did you get here?"

"In a carriage. I saw it in the paper at the last moment."

"Does Roger know you came?"

"No; he had gone to Mrs. Keith's."

"So you started off alone, at a moment's notice?"

She nodded, blushing. He was still holding her hand; he pressed it and dropped it. "O Hubert," cried Nora suddenly, "*now* I know you!"

Two ladies were lingering near, apparently mother and daughter. "I must be civil to them," he said; "they have come from New York to hear me." He quickly rejoined them and conducted them toward their carriage. The younger one was extremely pretty, and looked a little like a Jewess. Nora observed that she wore a great diamond in each ear; she eyed our heroine rather severely as they passed. In a few minutes Hubert came back, and, before she knew it, she had taken his arm and he was beside her in her own carriage. They drove to the hotel in silence; he went upstairs with her. Roger had

not returned. "Mrs. Keith is very agreeable," said Hubert. "But Roger knew that long ago. I suppose you have heard," he added; "but perhaps you have not heard."

"I have not heard," said Nora, "but I have suspected——"

"What?"

"No; it is for you to say."

"Why, that Mrs. Keith might have been Mrs. Lawrence."

"Ah, I was right,—I was right," murmured Nora, with a little air of triumph. "She may be still. I wish she would!" Nora was removing her bonnet before the mirror over the chimney-piece; as she spoke, she caught Hubert's eye in the glass. He dropped it and took up his hat. "Won't you wait?" she asked.

He said he thought he had better go, but he lingered without sitting down. Nora walked about the room, she hardly knew why, smoothing the table-covers and rearranging the chairs.

"Did you cry about your departure, the other night, as you promised?" Hubert asked.

"I confess that I was so tired with our adventures that I went straight to sleep."

"Keep your tears for a better cause. One of the greatest pleasures in life is in store for you. There are a hundred things I should like to say to you about Rome. How I only wish I were going to show it you! Let me beg you to go some day to a little place in the Via Felice, on the Pincian,—a house with a terrace adjoining the fourth floor. There is a plasterer's shop in the basement. You can reach the terrace by the common staircase. I occupied the rooms adjoining it, and it was my peculiar property. I remember I used often to share it with a poor little American sculptress who lived below. She made my bust;



the Apollo Belvedere was nothing to it. I wonder what has become of her ! Take a look at the view,—the view I woke up to every morning, read by, studied by, lived by. I used to alternate my periods of sight-seeing with fits of passionate study. In another winter I think I might have learned something. Your real lover of Rome oscillates with a kind of delicious pain between the city in itself and the city in literature. They keep for ever referring you to each other and bandying you to and fro. If we had eyes for metaphysical things, Nora, you might see a hundred odd bits of old ambitions and day-dreams strewing that little terrace. Ah, as I sat there, how the Campagna used to take up the tale and respond to my printed page ! If I know anything of the lesson of history (a man of my profession is supposed to), I learned it in that enchanted air ! I should like to know who is sitting in the same school now. Perhaps you will write me a word."

"I will piously gather up the crumbs of your feasts and make a meal of them," said Nora. "I will let you know how they taste."

"Pray do. And one more request. Don't let Mrs. Keith make a Catholic of you." And he put out his hand.

She shook her head slowly, as she took it. "I will have no Pope but you," she said.

And after that he went.

## VI

ROGER had assured his cousin that he meant to return home, and indeed, after Nora's departure, he spent a fortnight in the country. But finding he had no patience left for solitude, he again came to town and established himself for the winter. A restless need of getting rid of time caused him to resume his earlier social habits. It began to be said of him that now he had disposed of that queer little girl that he had picked up Heaven knew where (whom it was certainly very good-natured of Mrs. Keith to take off his hands), he was going to look about him for a young person whom he might take to his home in earnest. Roger felt as if he were now establishing himself in society in behalf of that larger personality into which his narrow singleness was destined to expand. He was paving the way for Nora. It seemed to him that she might find it an easy way to tread. He compared her attentively with every young girl he met; many were prettier, some possessed in larger degree the air of "brightness"; but none revealed that deep-shrined natural force, lurking in the shadow of modesty like a statue in a recess, which you hardly know whether to denominate humility or pride.

One evening, at a large party, Roger found himself approached by an elderly lady who had known him from his boyhood and for whom he had a traditional

regard, but with whom of late years he had relaxed his intercourse, from a feeling that, being a very worldly old woman, her influence on Nora might be pernicious. She had never smiled on the episode of which Nora was the heroine, and she hailed Roger's reappearance as a sign that this episode was at an end and that he had repented of his abrupt eccentricity. She was somewhat cynical in her shrewdness, and, so far as she might, she handled matters without gloves.

"I am glad to see you have found your wits again," she said, "and that that forlorn little orphan—Dora, Flora, what's her name?—has not altogether made a fool of you. You want to marry; come, don't deny it. You can no more remain unmarried than I can remain standing here. Go ask that little man for his chair. With your means and your disposition and all the rest of it, you ought by this time to be setting a good example. But it's never too late to mend. I have got the thing for you. Have you been introduced to Miss Sands? Who is Miss Sands? There you are to the life! Miss Sands is Miss Sands, the young lady in whose honour we are here convened. She is staying with my sister. You must have heard of her. New York, but good New York; so pretty that she might be as silly as you please, yet as clever and good as if she were as plain as I. She is everything a man can want. If you have not seen her it's providential. Come; don't protest for the sake of protesting. I have thought it all out. Allow me! in this matter I am a woman of genius. I know at a glance what will do and what won't. You are made for each other. Come and be presented. You have just time to settle down to it before supper."

Then came into Roger's honest visage a sort of Mephistophelian glee,—the momentary intoxication of duplicity. "Well, well," he said, "let us see all

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that's to be seen." And he thought of his Peruvian Teresa. Miss Sands, however, proved no Teresa, and Roger's friend had not overstated her merits. Her beauty was remarkable; and strangely, in spite of her blooming maturity, something in her expression, her smile, reminded him forcibly of Nora. So Nora might look after ten or twelve years of evening parties. There was a hint, just a hint, of customary triumph in the poise of her head, an air of serene success in her carriage; but it was her especial charm that she seemed to melt downward and condescend from this altitude of loveliness with a benignant and considerate grace; to drop, as it were, from the zenith of her favour, with a little shake of invitation, the silken cable of a gradual smile. Roger felt that there was so little to be feared from her that he actually enjoyed the mere surface-glow of his admiration; the sense of floating unmelted in the genial zone of her presence, like a polar ice-block in a summer sea. The more he observed her, the more she seemed to foreshadow his prospective Nora; so that at last, borrowing confidence from this phantasmal identity, he addressed her with unaffected friendliness. Miss Sands, who was a woman of perceptions, seeing an obviously modest man swimming, as it were, in this mystical calm, became interested. She divined in Roger's manner an unusual species of admiration. She had feasted her fill on uttered flattery; but here was a good man whose appreciation left compliments far behind. At the end of ten minutes Roger mentioned that she reminded him singularly of a young girl he knew. "A young girl, forsooth," thought Miss Sands. "Is he coming to his *fadaises*, like the rest of them?"

"You are older than she," Roger added, "but I expect her to look like you some time hence."

"I gladly bequeath her my youth, as I come to give it up."

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"You can never have been plain," said Roger. "My friend, just now, is no beauty. But I assure you, you encourage me."

"Tell me about this young lady," his companion rejoined. "It is interesting to hear about people one looks like."

"I should like to tell you," said Roger, "but you would laugh at me."

"You do me injustice. Evidently this is a matter of sentiment. Genuine sentiment is the best thing in the world; and when I catch myself laughing at a mortal who confesses to it, I submit to being told that I have grown old only to grow silly."

Roger smiled approval. "I can only say," he answered, "that this young friend of mine is, to me, the most interesting object in the world."

"In other words, you are engaged to marry her."

"Not a bit of it."

"Why, then, she is a deaf-mute whom you have rendered vocal, or a pretty heathen whom you have brought to Sunday school."

Roger laughed exuberantly. "You have hit it," he said; "a deaf-mute whom I have taught to speak. Add to that, that she was a little blind, and that now she recognises me with spectacles, and you will admit that I have reason to be proud of my work." Then, after a pause he pursued, seriously, "If anything were to happen to her——"

"If she were to lose her faculties——"

"I should be in despair. But I know what I should do. I should come to you."

"O, I should be a poor substitute!"

"I should make love to you," Roger went on.

"You would be in despair indeed. But you must bring me some supper."

Half an hour later, as the ladies were cloaking themselves, Mrs. Middleton, who had undertaken

Roger's case, asked Miss Sands for her impressions. These seemed to have been highly propitious. "He is not a shining light, perhaps," the young lady said, "but he is an honest man. He is in earnest; after what I have been through, that is very pleasant. And by the way, what is this little deaf and dumb girl in whom he is interested?"

Mrs. Middleton stared. "I never heard she was deaf and dumb. Very likely. He adopted her and brought her up. He has sent her abroad—to learn the languages!"

Miss Sands mused as they descended the stairs. "He is a good man," she said. "I like him."

It was in consequence, doubtless, of this last remark that Roger, the next morning, received a note from his friend. "You have made a hit; I shall never forgive you if you don't follow it up. You have only to be decently civil and then propose. Come and dine with me on Wednesday. I shall have only one guest. You know I always take a nap after dinner."

The same post that brought Mrs. Middleton's note brought a letter from Nora. It was dated from Rome, and ran as follows:—

"I hardly know, dearest Roger, whether to begin with an apology or a scolding. We have each something to forgive, but you have certainly least. I have before me your two poor little notes, which I have been reading over for the twentieth time; trying, in this city of miracles, to work upon them the miracle of the loaves and fishes. But the miracle won't come: they remain only two very much be-thumbed epistles. Dear Roger, I have been extremely vexed and uneasy. I have fancied you were ill, or, worse,—that out of sight is out of mind. It is not with me, I assure you. I have written you *twelve* little letters. They have been short only because I have been horribly busy. To-day I declined an

invitation to drive on the Campagna, on purpose to write to you. The Campagna,—do you hear? I can hardly believe that, five months ago, I was watching the ripe apples drop in the orchard at C——. We are always on our second floor on the Pincian, with plenty of sun, which you know is the great necessity here. Close at hand are the great steps of the Piazza di Spagna, where the beggars and models sit at the receipt of custom. Some of them are so handsome, sunning themselves there in their picturesqueness, that I cannot help wishing I knew how to paint or draw. I wish I had been a good girl three years ago and done as you wished, and taken drawing-lessons in earnest. Dear Roger, I never neglected your advice but to my cost. Mrs. Keith is extremely kind, and determined I shall have not come abroad to ‘mope,’ as she says. She does not care much for sight-seeing, having done it all before; though she keeps pretty well *au courant* of the various church festivals. She very often talks of you, and is very fond of you. She is full of good points, but that is her best one. My own sight-seeing habits do not at all incommode her, owing to my having made the acquaintance of a little old German lady who lives at the top of our house. She is a queer wizened oddity of a woman, but she is very clever and friendly, and she has the things of Rome on her fingers’ ends. The reason of her being here is very sad and beautiful. Twelve years ago her younger sister, a beautiful girl (she has shown me her miniature), was deceived and abandoned by her betrothed. She fled away from her home, and after many weary wanderings found her way to Rome, and gained admission to the convent with the dreadful name,—the Sepolte Vive. Here, ever since, she has been immured. The inmates are literally buried alive; they are dead to the outer world. My poor little Mademoiselle Stamm followed

her and took up her dwelling here, to be near her. But they have a dead stone wall between them. For twelve years she has never seen her. Her only communication with Lisa—her conventual name she doesn't even know—is once a week to deposit a bouquet of flowers, with her name attached, in the little blind wicket of the convent wall. To do this with her own hands, she lives in Rome. She composes her bouquet with a kind of passion; I have seen her and helped her. Fortunately flowers in Rome are very cheap, for my friend is deplorably poor. I have had a little pleasure, or rather a great pleasure. For the past two months I have furnished the flowers, and I assure you we have had the best. I go each time with Mademoiselle Stamm to the wicket, and we put in our bouquet and see it gobbled up into the speechless maw of the cloister. It is a dismal amusement, but I confess it interests me. I feel as if I knew this poor Lisa; though, after all, she may be dead, and we may be worshipping a shadow. But in this city of shadows and memories, what is one shadow the more? Don't think, however, that we spend all our time in playing with shadows. We go everywhere, we see everything; I could not be in better hands. Mrs. Keith has doubts about my friend's moral influence; she accuses her of being a German philosopher in petticoats. She is a German, she wears petticoats; and having known poverty and unhappiness, she is obliged to be something of a philosopher. As for her metaphysics, they may be very wicked, but I should be too stupid to understand them, and it is less trouble to abide by my own—and Mrs. Keith's! At all events, I have told her all about you, and she says you are the one good man she ever heard of; so it's not for you to disapprove of her! My mornings I spend with her; after lunch I go out with Mrs. Keith. We drive to



the various villas, make visits upon all kinds of people, go to studios and churches and palaces. In the evenings we hold high revel. Mrs. Keith knows every one ; she receives a great many people, and we go out in proportion. It is a most amusing world. I have seen more people in the last six weeks than I ever expected to in a lifetime. I feel so old,—you wouldn't know me ! One grows more in a month in this wonderful Rome than in a year at home. Mrs. Keith is very much liked and admired. She has lightened her mourning and looks much better ; but, as she says, she will never be herself till she gets back to pink. As for me, I wear pink and blue and every colour of the rainbow. It appears that everything suits me ; there is no spoiling me. Of course, I am *out*,—a thousand miles out. I came out six weeks ago at the great ball of the Princess X. How the Princess X.—poor lady !—came to serve my turn, is more than I can say ; but Mrs. Keith is a fairy godmother ; she shod me in glass slippers and we went. I fortunately came home with my slippers on my feet. I was very much frightened when we went in. I courtesied to the Princess : and the Princess stared good-naturedly ; while I heard Mrs. Keith behind me whispering, ' Lower, lower ! ' But I have yet to learn how to courtesy to condescending princesses. Now I can drop a little bow to a good old cardinal as smartly as you please. Mrs. Keith has presented me to half-a-dozen, with whom I pass, I suppose, for an interesting convert. Alas, I am only a convert to worldly vanities, which I confess I vastly enjoy. Dear Roger, I am hopelessly frivolous. The shrinking diffidence of childhood I have utterly cast away. I speak up at people as bold as brass. I like having them introduced to me, and having to be interested and interesting at a moment's notice. I like listening and watching ; I like sitting up to

the small hours ; I like talking myself. But I need hardly to tell you this, at the end of my ten pages of chatter. I have talked about my own affairs, because I know they will interest you. Profit by my good example, and tell me all about yours. Do you miss me ? I have read over and over your two little notes, to find some little hint that you do ; but not a word ! I confess I wouldn't have you too unhappy. I am so glad to hear you are in town, and not at that dreary, wintry C——. Is our old C—— life at an end, I wonder ? Nothing can ever be the same after a winter in Rome. Sometimes I am half frightened at having had it in my youth. It leaves such a chance to be dull afterwards ! But I shall come back some day with you. And not even the Princess X. shall make me forget my winter seat by the library fire at C——, my summer seat under the great elm."

This production seemed to Roger a marvel of intellectual promise and epistolary grace ; it filled his eyes with grateful tears ; he carried it in his pocket-book and read it to a dozen people. His tears, however, were partly those of penitence, as well as of delight. He had had a purpose in preserving that silence, which had cost so much to his good-nature. He wished to make Nora miss him, and to let silence combine with absence to plead for him. Had he succeeded ? Not too well, it would seem ; yet well enough to make him feel that he had been cruel. His letter occupied him so intensely that it was not till within an hour of Mrs. Middleton's dinner that he remembered his engagement. In the drawing-room he found Miss Sands, looking even more beautiful in a dark high-necked dress than in the glory of gauze and flowers. During dinner he was in excellent spirits ; he uttered perhaps no epigrams, but he gave, by his laughter, an epigrammatic turn to the ladyish gossip of his companions. Mrs. Middleton enter-

tained the best hopes. When they had left the table she betook herself to her arm-chair, and erected a little hand-screen before her face, behind which she slept or not, as you choose. Roger, suddenly bethinking himself that if Miss Sands had been made a party to the old lady's views, his alacrity of manner might compromise him, checked his vivacity, and asked his companion stiffly if she played the piano. On her confessing to this accomplishment, he of course proceeded to open the instrument which stood in the adjoining room. Here Miss Sands sat down and played with great resolution an exquisite composition of Schubert. As she struck the last note he uttered some superlative of praise. She was silent for a moment, and then, "That is a thing I rarely play," she said.

"It is very difficult, I suppose."

"It is not only difficult, but it is too sad."

"Sad!" cried Roger, "I should call it very joyous."

"You must be in very good spirits! I take it to have been meant for pure sadness. This is what should suit your mood!" and she attacked with great animation one of Strauss's waltzes. But she had played but a dozen chords when he interrupted her. "Spare me," he said. "I may be glad, but not with that gladness. I confess that I *am* in spirits. I have just had a letter from that young friend of whom I spoke to you."

"Your adopted daughter? Mrs. Middleton told me about her."

"Mrs. Middleton," said Roger, in downright fashion, "knows nothing about her. Mrs. Middleton," and he lowered his voice and laughed, "is not an oracle of wisdom." He glanced into the other room at their hostess and her complaisant screen. He felt with peculiar intensity that, whether she was napping or no, she was a sadly superficial—in fact a positively

immoral—old woman. It seemed absurd to believe that this fair, wise creature before him had lent herself to a scheme of such a one's making. He looked awhile at her deep clear eyes and her gracious lips. It would be a satisfaction to smile with her over Mrs. Middleton's machinations. "Do you know what she wants to do with us?" he went on. "She wants to make a match between us."

He waited for her smile, but it was heralded by a blush,—a blush portentous, formidable, tragical. Like a sudden glow of sunset in a noonday sky, it covered her fair face and burned on her cloudless brow. "The deuce!" thought Roger. "Can it be,—can it be?" The smile he had invoked followed fast; but this was not the order of nature.

"A match between *us*!" said Miss Sands. "What a brilliant idea!"

"Not that I cannot easily imagine falling in love with you," Roger rejoined; "but—but——" ..

"But you are in love with some one else." Her eyes, for a moment, rested on him intently. "With your protégée!"

Roger hesitated. It seemed odd to be making this sacred confidence to a stranger; but with this matter of Mrs. Middleton's little arrangement between them, she was hardly a stranger. If he had offended her, too, the part of gallantry was to admit everything. "Yes, I am in love!" he said. "And with the young lady you so much resemble. She doesn't know it. Only one or two persons know it, save yourself. It is the secret of my life, Miss Sands. She is abroad. I have wished to do what I could for her. It is an odd sort of position, you know. I have brought her up with the view of making her my wife, but I have never breathed a word of it to her. She must choose for herself. My hope is that she will choose me. But Heaven knows what turn

she may take, what may happen to her over there in Rome. I hope for the best ; but I think of little else. Meanwhile I go about with a sober face, and eat and sleep and talk, like the rest of the world ; but all the while I am counting the hours. Really, I don't know what has set me going in this way. I don't suppose you will at all understand my situation; but you are evidently so good that I feel as if I might count on your sympathy."

Miss Sands listened with her eyes bent downward, and with great gravity. When he had spoken, she gave him her hand with a certain passionate abruptness. " You have my sympathy ! " she said. " Much good may it do you ! I know nothing of your friend, but it is hard to fancy her disappointing you. I perhaps don't altogether enter into your situation. It is novel, but it is extremely interesting. I hope before rejecting you she will think twice. I don't bestow my esteem at random, but you have it, Mr. Lawrence, absolutely." And with these words she rose. At the same moment their hostess suspended her siesta, and the conversation became general. It can hardly be said, however, to have prospered. Miss Sands talked with a certain gracious zeal which was not unallied, I imagine, to a desire to efface the trace of that superb blush I have attempted to chronicle. Roger brooded and wondered ; and Mrs. Middleton, fancying that things were not going well, expressed her displeasure by abusing every one who was mentioned. She took heart again for the moment when, on the young lady's carriage being announced, the latter, turning in farewell to Roger, asked him if he ever came to New York. " When you are next there," she said, " you must make a point of coming to see me. You will have something to tell me."

After she had gone Roger demanded of Mrs. Middleton whether she had imparted to Miss Sands

her scheme for their common felicity. "Never mind what I said or did not say," she replied. "She knows enough not to be taken unawares. And now tell me——" But Roger would tell her nothing. He made his escape, and as he walked home in the frosty starlight, his face wore a smile of the most shameless elation. He had gone up in the market. Nora might do worse! There stood that beautiful woman knocking at his door.

A few evenings after this Roger called upon Hubert. Not immediately, but on what may be called the second line of conversation, Hubert asked him what news he had from Nora. Roger replied by reading her letter aloud. For some moments after he had finished Hubert was silent. "'One grows more in a month in this wonderful Rome,'" he said at last, quoting, "'than in a year at home.'"

"Grow, grow, grow, and Heaven speed it!" said Roger.

"She is growing, you may depend upon it."

"Of course she is; and yet," said Roger, discriminatingly, "there is a kind of girlish freshness, a childish simplicity, in her style."

"Strongly marked," said Hubert, laughing. "I have just got a letter from her you would take to be written by a child of ten."

"*You* have a letter?"

"It came an hour ago. Let me read it."

"Had you written to her?"

"Not a word. But you will see." And Hubert in his dressing-gown, standing before the fire, with the same silver-sounding accents Nora had admired, distilled her own gentle prose into Roger's attentive ear.

"I have not forgotten your asking me to write to you about your beloved Pincian view. Indeed, I have been daily reminded of it by having that same view

continually before my eyes. From my own window I see the same dark Rome, the same blue Campagna. I have rigorously performed my promise, however, of ascending to your little terrace. I have an old German friend here, a perfect archæologist in petticoats, in whose company I think as little of climbing to terraces and towers as of diving into catacombs and crypts. We chose the finest day of the winter, and made the pilgrimage together. The plaster-merchant is still in the basement. We saw him in his doorway, standing to dry, whitened over as if he meant personally to be cast. We reached your terrace in safety. It was flooded with light,—you know the Roman light,—the yellow and the purple. A young painter who occupies your rooms had set up his easel under an umbrella in the open air. A young *contadina*, imported, I suppose, from the Piazza di Spagna, was sitting to him in the sunshine, which deepened her brown face, her blue-black hair, and her white head-cloth. He was flattering her to his heart's content, and of course to hers. When I want my portrait painted, I shall know where to go. My friend explained to him that we had come to look at his terrace on behalf of an unhappy far-away American gentleman who had once been lodger there. Hereupon he was charmingly polite. He showed us the little *salotto*, the fragment of bas-relief inserted in the wall,—was it there in your day?—and a dozen of his own pictures. One of them was a very pretty version of the view from the terrace. Does it betray an indecent greed for applause to let you know that I bought it, and that, if you are very good and write me a delightful long letter, you shall have it when I get home? It seemed to me that you would be glad to learn that your little habitation is not turned to baser uses, and that genius and ambition may still be found there. In your case, I suppose, they were

not found in company with dark-eyed *contadine*, though they had an admirer in the person of that poor little American sculptress. I asked the young painter if she had left any memory behind her. Only a memory, it appears. She died a month after his arrival. I never was so bountifully thanked for anything as for buying our young man's picture. As he poured out his lovely Italian gratitude, I felt like some patronising duchess of the Renaissance. You will have to do your best, when I transfer the picture to your hands, to give as pretty a turn to your thanks. This is only one specimen of a hundred delightful rambles I have had with Mlle. Stamm. We go a great deal to the churches ; I never tire of them. Not in the least that I am turning Papist, though in Mrs. Keith's society, if I chose to do so, I might treat myself to the luxury of being a nine days' wonder (admire my self-denial !), but because they are so picturesque and historic ; so redolent of memories, so rich with traditions, so haunted with the past. To go into most of the churches is like reading some novel, better than I find most novels. They are for different days. On a fine day, if I have on my best bonnet, if I have been to a party the night before, I like to go to Santa-Maria Maggiore. Standing there, I dream, I dream, I dream ; I should be ashamed to tell you the nonsense I *do* dream ! On a rainy day, when I tramp out with Mlle. Stamm in my waterproof ; when the evening before, instead of going to a party, I have sat quietly at home reading Rio's *Art Chrétien* (recommended by the Abbé Leblond, Mrs. Keith's confessor), I like to go to the Ara Coeli. There you stand among the very bric-à-prac of Christian history. Something takes you at the throat, —but you will have felt it ; I needn't try to define the indefinable. Nevertheless, in spite of M. Rio and the Abbé Leblond (he is a very charming old man too,



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and a keeper of *ladies'* consciences, if there ever was one), there is small danger of my changing my present faith for one that will make it a sin to go and hear you preach. Of course, we don't only haunt the churches. I know in a way the Vatican, the Capitol, and those charming galleries of the great palaces. Of course, you know them far better. I am stopped short on every side by my deplorable ignorance ; still, as far as may be given to a silly girl, I enjoy. I wish you were here, or that I knew some benevolent man of culture. My little German duenna is a marvel of learning and communicativeness, and when she fairly harangues me, I feel as if in my single person I were a young ladies' boarding-school. But only a man can talk really to the point of this manliest of cities. Mrs. Keith sees a great many gentlemen of one sort and another ; but what do they know of Brutus and Augustus, of Emperors and Popes ? I shall keep my impressions, such as they are, and we shall talk them over at our leisure. I shall bring home plenty of photographs ; we shall have charming evenings looking at them. Roger writes that he means next winter to take a furnished house in town. You must come often and see us. We are to spend the summer in England. . . . Do you often see Roger ? I suppose so,—he wrote he was having a "capital winter." By the way, I am "out." I go to balls and wear Paris dresses. I toil not, neither do I spin. There is apparently no end to my banker's account, and Mrs. Keith sets me a prodigious example of buying. Is Roger meanwhile going about with patched elbows ? " "

At this point Hubert stopped, and, on Roger's asking him if there was nothing more, declared that the rest was private. "As you please," said Roger. "By Jove ! what a letter,—what a letter !"

Several months later, in September, he hired for

the ensuing winter a small furnished house. Mrs. Keith and her companion were expected to reach home on the 10th of October. On the 6th, Roger took possession of his house. Most of the rooms had been repainted, and on preparing to establish himself in one for the night, Roger found that the fresh paint emitted such an odour as to make his position untenable. Exploring the premises, he discovered in the lower regions, in a kind of sub-basement, a small vacant apartment, destined to a servant, in which he had a bed put up. It was damp, but, as he thought, not too damp, the basement being dry, as basements go. For three nights he occupied this room. On the fourth morning he woke up with a chill and a headache. By noon he had a fever. The physician, being sent for, pronounced him seriously ill, and assured him that he had been guilty of a gross imprudence. He might as well have slept in a burial-vault. It was the first sanitary indiscretion Roger had ever committed ; he had a dismal foreboding of its results. Towards evening the fever deepened, and he began to lose his head. He was still distinctly conscious that Nora was to arrive on the morrow, and sadly disgusted that she was to find him in this sorry plight. It was a bitter disappointment that he might not meet her at the steamer. Still, Hubert might go. He sent for Hubert accordingly, who was brought to his bedside. " I shall be all right in a day or two," he said, " but meanwhile some one must receive Nora. I know you will be glad to do it, you villain ! "

Hubert declared that he was no villain, but that he should be happy to perform this service. As he looked at his poor fever-stricken cousin, however, he doubted strongly if Roger would be " all right " in a day or two. On the morrow he went down to the ship.

## VII

ON arriving at the landing-place of the European steamer, Hubert found the passengers filing ashore from the tug-boat in which they had been transferred from the ship. He instructed himself, as he took his place near the gangway, to allow for a certain change in Nora's appearance ; but even with this allowance none of the various advancing ladies seemed to be Nora. Suddenly he found himself confronted with a fair stranger, a smile, and an outstretched hand. The smile and the offered hand of course proclaimed the young lady's identity. Yet in spite of them, Hubert's surprise was great ; his allowance had been too small. But the next moment, " Now you speak," he said, " I recognise you " ; and the next he had greeted Mrs. Keith, who immediately followed her companion ; after which he ushered the two ladies, with their servant and their various feminine *impedimenta*, into a carriage. Mrs. Keith was to return directly to her own house, where, hospitable even amid prospective chaos, she invited Hubert to join them at dinner. He had, of course, been obliged to inform Nora offhand of the cause of Roger's absence, though as yet he made light of his illness. It was agreed, however, that Nora should remain with her companion until she had communicated with her guardian.

Entering Mrs. Keith's drawing-room a couple of

hours later, Hubert found the young girl on her knees before the hearth. He sat down near by, and in the glow of the firelight he noted her altered aspect. A year, somehow, had made more than a year's difference. Hubert, in his intercourse with women, was accustomed to indulge in a sort of cool contemplation which, as a habit, found favour according to the sensibility of the ladies touching whom it was practised. It had been intimated to him more than once, that, in spite of his cloth, just a certain turn of the head made this a license. But on this occasion his gaze was all respectful. He was lost in admiration ; for Nora was beautiful. She had left home a simple maiden of common gifts, with no greater burden of loveliness than the slender, angular, neutral grace of youth and freshness ; and here she stood, a mature, consummate, superb young woman ! It was as if she had bloomed into ripeness in the sunshine of a great contentment ; as if, fed by the sources of esthetic delight, her nature had risen calmly to its allotted level. A singular harmony and serenity seemed to pervade her person. Her beauty lay in no inordinate perfection of individual features, but in the deep sweet fellowship that reigned between smile and step and glance and tone. The total effect was an impression of the simplest and yet the richest loveliness. " Pallas Athene," said Hubert to himself, " sprang full-armed, we are told, from the brain of Jove. But we have a Western version of the myth. She was born in Missouri ; for years she wore aprons and carried lesson-books. Then one fine day she was eighteen, and she sported a black silk dress of Paris ! " Meanwhile Pallas Athene had been asking about Roger. " Shall I see him to-morrow, at least ? " she demanded.

" I think not ; he will not get out for several days."

" But I can easily go to him. It is very tiresome.

Things never turn out as we arrange them. I had arranged this meeting of ours to perfection! He was to dine with us here, and we were to talk, talk, talk till midnight; and then I was to go home with him; and there we were to stand leaning on the banisters at his room door, and talk, talk, talk till morning."

"And where was I to be?" asked Hubert.

"I had not arranged for you. But I expected to see you to-morrow. To-morrow I shall go to Roger."

"If the doctor allows," said Hubert.

Nora rose to her feet. "You don't mean to say, Hubert, that it is as bad as *that*?" She frowned a little and bent her eyes eagerly on his face. Hubert heard Mrs. Keith's voice in the hall; in a moment their *tête-à-tête* would be at an end. Instead of answering her question,—*"Nora,"* he said, in his deepest, lowest voice, "you are wonderfully beautiful!" He caught her startled, unsatisfied glance; then he turned and greeted Mrs. Keith. He had not pleased Nora, evidently; it was premature. So to efface the solemnity of his speech, he repeated it aloud: "I tell Nora she is very beautiful!"

"Bah!" said Mrs. Keith; "you needn't tell her; she knows it."

Nora smiled unconfusedly. "O, say it all the same!"

"Was it not the French ambassador, in Rome," Mrs. Keith demanded, "who attacked you in that fashion? He asked to be introduced. There's an honour! '*Mademoiselle, vous êtes parfaitement belle.*'"

"He was very ugly himself," said Nora.

Hubert was a lover of the luxuries and splendours of life. He had no immediate personal need of them; he could make his terms with narrow circumstances; but his imagination was a born aristocrat. He liked to be reminded that certain things were,—ambassadors, ambassadorial compliments, Old - World drawing-

rooms with duskily moulded ceilings. Nora's beauty, to his vision, took a deeper colour from this homage of an old starched and embroidered diplomatist. It was valid, it had passed the ordeal. He had little need at table to play at discreet inattention. Mrs. Keith, preoccupied with her housekeeping and the "dreadful state" in which her freshly departed tenants had left her rooms, indulged in a tragic monologue and dispensed with responses. Nora, looking frankly at Hubert, consoled their hostess with gentle optimism; and Hubert returned her looks, wondering. He mused upon the mystery of beauty. What sudden magic had made her so handsome? She was the same tender slip of girlhood who had come trembling to hear him preach a year before; the same, yet how different! And how sufficient she had grown, *withal*, to her beauty! How *with* the added burden *had* come an added strength,—with the greater *charm* a greater force,—a force subtle, sensitive, just faintly self-suspecting. Then came the thought that all this was Roger's,—Roger's speculation, Roger's property! He pitied the poor fellow, lying senseless and helpless instead of sitting there delightedly, drawing her out and showing her off. After dinner Nora talked little, partly, as he felt, *from* anxiety about her friend, and partly because of that natural reserve of the altered mind when confronted with old associations. He would have been glad to believe that she was taking pensive note of his own appearance. He had made his mark in her mind a twelvemonth before. Innumerable scenes and figures had since passed over it; but his figure, Nora now discovered, had not been obliterated. Fixed there indelibly, it had grown with the growth of her imagination. She knew that she had changed, and she had wondered whether Hubert would have lost favour with difference. Would he suffer by contrast

with people she had seen ? Would he seem graceless, colourless, common ? Little by little, as his presence defined itself, it became plain to her that the Hubert of the past had a lease of the future. As he rose to take his leave, she begged him to let her write a line to Roger, which he might carry.

"He will not be able to read it," said Hubert.

Nora mused. "I will write it, nevertheless. You will place it by his bedside, and the moment he is better he will find it at hand."

When she had left the room, Mrs. Keith demanded tribute. "Have not I done well ? Have not I made a charming girl of her ?"

"She does you great credit," said Hubert, with a mental reservation.

"O, but wait awhile ! You have not seen her yet. She is tired, and anxious about your cousin. Wait till she comes out. My dear Mr. Lawrence, she is perfect. She lacks nothing, she has nothing too much. You must do me justice. I saw it all in the rough, and I knew just what it wanted. I wish she were my daughter : you should see great doings ! And she's as good as gold. It's her nature. After all, unless your nature is right, what are you ?" But before Hubert could reply to this little philosophic proposition, Nora reappeared with her note.

The next morning Mrs. Keith went to call officially upon her mother-in-law ; and Nora, left alone and thinking much of Roger's condition, conceived an intense desire to see him. He had never been so dear to her as now, and no one's right to be with him was equal to hers. She dressed hastily and repaired to the little dwelling they were to have so happily occupied. She was admitted by her old friend Lucinda, who, between trouble and wonder, found a thousand things to say. Nora's beauty had never received warmer tribute than the affectionate mar-

vellings of this old woman who had known her early plainness so well. She led her into the drawing-room, opened the windows and turned her about in the light, patted her braided tresses, and rejoiced with motherly unction in her tallness and straightness and elegance. Of Roger she spoke with tearful eyes. "It would be for him to see you, my dear," she said; "he would not be disappointed. You are better than his brightest dreams. O, I know all about it! He used to talk to me evenings, after you were in bed. 'Lucinda, do you think she's pretty? Lucinda, do you think she's plain? Lucinda, do you dress her warm? Lucinda, have you changed her shoes? And mind, Lucinda, take good care of her hair; it's the only thing we are sure of!' Yes, my dear, you have me to thank for these big braids. Would he feel sure of you now, poor man? You must ~~keep~~ keep yourself in cotton-wool till he recovers. You are like a picture; you ought to be enclosed in a gilt frame and stand against the wall." Lucinda begged, however, that Nora would not insist upon seeing him; and her great reluctance betraying his evil case, Nora consented to wait. Her own small experience could avail nothing. "He is flighty," said Lucinda, "and I'm afraid he wouldn't recognise you. If he shouldn't, it would do you **no** good; and if he should, it would do him none; it would increase his fever. He's bad, my dear, he's bad; but leave him to me! I nursed him as a baby; I nursed him as a boy; I will nurse him as a man grown. I have seen him worse than this, with the scarlet fever at college, when his poor mother was dying at home. Baby, boy, and man, he has always had the patience of a saint. I will keep him for you, Miss Nora, now I have seen you! I shouldn't dare to meet him in heaven, if I were to let him miss you!"

When Lucinda had returned to her bedside duties,



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Nora wandered about the house with a soundless tread, taking melancholy note of the preparations Roger had made for her return. His choice, his taste, his ingenuity, were everywhere visible. The best beloved of her possessions from the old house in the country had been transferred hither and placed in such kindly half-lights as would temper justice with mercy ; others had found expensive substitutes. Nora went into the drawing-room, where the blinds were closed and the chairs and sofas shrouded in brown linen, and sat sadly revolving possibilities. How, with Roger's death, loneliness again would close about her ; how he was her world, her strength, her fate ! He had made her life ; she needed him still to watch his work. She seemed to apprehend, as by a sudden supernatural light, the extent of his affection and his wisdom. In the perfect stillness of the house she could almost hear his tread on the stairs, hear his voice utter her name with that tender adjustment of tone which conveyed a benediction in a commonplace. Her heart rose to her throat ; she felt a passionate desire to scream. She buried her head in a cushion to stifle the sound ; her silent tears fell upon the silk. Suddenly she heard a step in the hall ; she had only time to brush them away before Hubert Lawrence came in. He greeted her with surprise. "I came to bring your note," he said ; "I did not expect to find you."

"Where better should I be ? " she asked, with intensity. "I can do nothing here, but I should look ill elsewhere. Give me back my note, please. It does not say half I feel." He gave it back, and stood watching her while she tore it in bits and threw it into the empty fire-place. "I have been wandering over the house," she added. "Everything tells me of poor Roger." She felt an indefinable need of protesting of her affection for him. "I never knew

till now," she said, "how much I loved him. I am sure you don't know him, Hubert; not as I do. I don't believe any one does. People always speak of him with a little air of amusement. Even Mrs. Keith is witty at his expense. But I know him; I grew to know him in thinking of him while I was away. There is more of him than the world knows or than the world would ever know, if it were left to his modesty and the world's stupidity!" Hubert began to smile at her eloquence. "But I mean to put an end to his modesty. I mean to say, 'Come, Roger, hold up your head and speak out your mind and do yourself justice.' I have seen people without a quarter of his goodness who had twenty times his assurance and his success. I shall turn the tables! People shall have no favour from me, unless they are good to Roger. If they want me, they must take him too. They tell me I am a beauty, and I can do what I please. We shall see. The first thing I shall do will be to make them show him a great deal of respect."

"I admire your spirit," said Hubert. "Dr. Johnson liked a good hater; I like a good lover. On the whole, it's more rarely found. But aren't you the least bit Quixotic, with your terrible loyalty? No one denies that Roger is the best of the best of the best! But do what you please, Nora, you cannot make virtue entertaining. As a clergyman, you know, I have had to try it. But it's no use; there's a fatal family likeness between goodness and dulness. Of course you are fond of Roger. So am I, so is every one in his heart of hearts. But what are we to do about it? The kindest thing is to leave him alone. His virtues are his own affair. You describe him perfectly when you say that everything in the house here sings his praise,—already, before he has been here ten days! The chairs are all straight, the

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pictures are admirably hung, the locks are oiled, the winter fuel is stocked, the bills are paid ! Look at the tidies pinned on the chairs. I will warrant you he pinned them with his own hands. Such is Roger ! Such virtues, in a household, are priceless. He ought never to marry ; his wife would die for want <sup>of</sup> occupation. What society cares for in a man is not his household virtues, but his worldly ones.\* I am talking now, of course, as a man of the world. Society wants to see things by the large end of the telescope, not by the small. 'Be as good as you please,' it says, 'but unless you are interesting, I'll none of you !' "

"Interesting !" cried Nora, with a rosy flush. "I have seen some very interesting people who have bored me to death. But if people don't care for Roger, it's their own loss !" Pausing a moment she fixed Hubert with the searching candour of her gaze. "You are unjust," she said.

This charge was pleasant to the young man's soul ; he would not, for the world, have summarily rebutted it. "Explain, dear cousin," he said, smiling kindly. "Wherein am I unjust ? "

It was the first time he had called her cousin ; the word made a sweet confusion in her thoughts. But looking at him still while she collected them, "You don't care to know !" she cried. "Not when you smile so ! You are laughing at me, at Roger, at every one !" Clever men had ere this been called dreadfully satirical by pretty women ; but never, surely, with just that imperious naïveté. She spoke with a kind of joy in her frankness ; the sense of intimacy with the young man had effaced the sense of difference.

"The scoffing fiend ! That's a pretty character to give a clergyman !" said Hubert.

"Are you, at heart, a clergyman ? I have been wondering."

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"You have heard me preach."

"Yes, a year ago, when I was a silly little girl. I want to hear you again."

"No, I have gained my crown, I propose to keep it. I would rather not be found out. Besides, I am not preaching now; I am resting. Some people think me a clergyman, Nora," he said, lowering his voice with a hint of mock humility. "But do you know you are formidable, with your fierce friendships and your jealous suspicions? If you doubt of me, well and good. Let me walk like an Homeric god in a cloud; without my cloud, I should be sadly ungodlike. Indeed, for that matter, I doubt of myself. But I don't really undervalue Roger. I love him, I admire him, I envy him. I would give the world to be able to exchange my restless imagination for his silent, sturdy usefulness. I feel as if I were toiling in the sun, and he were sitting under green trees resting from an effort which he has never needed to make. Well, virtue, I suppose, is welcome to the shade. It's cool, but it's dreadfully obscure! People are free to find out the best and the worst of me! Here I stand, with all my imperfections on my head; tricked out with a surplice, baptized with a *reverend* (Heaven save the mark!), equipped with platform and pulpit and text and audience,—erected into a mouthpiece of the spiritual aspirations of mankind. Well, I confess our sins; that's good humble-minded work. And I must say, in justice, that when once I don my surplice (I insist on the surplice, I can do nothing without it) and mount into the pulpit, I feel conscious of a certain power. They call it eloquence; I suppose it is. I don't know what it's worth, but they seem to like it."

Nora sat speechless, with expanded eyes, hardly knowing whether his humility or his audacity became him best; flattered, above all, by what she deemed

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the recklessness of his confidence. She had removed her hat, which she held in her hand, gently curling its great black feather. Few things in a woman could be prettier than her uncovered forehead, illumined with her gentle wonder. The moment, for Hubert, was critical. He knew that a young girl's heart stood trembling on the verge of his influence; he felt, without fatuity, that a glance might beckon her forward, a word might fix her there. Should he speak his word? This mystic circle was haunted with the rustling ghosts of women who had ventured within and found no rest. But as the innermost meaning of Nora's beauty grew vivid before him, it seemed to him that she, at least, might cleanse it of its sinister memories and fill it with the sense of peace. He knew that to such as Nora he was no dispenser of peace; but as he looked at her she seemed to him as an angel knocking at his gates. He could not turn her away. Let her come, at her risk! For angels there is a special providence. "Don't think me worse than I am," he said, "but don't think me better! I shall love Roger well until I begin to fancy that you love him too well. Then, —it's absurd, perhaps, but I feel it will be so,—I shall be jealous."

The words were lightly uttered, but his eyes and voice gave them meaning. Nora coloured and rose; she went to the mirror and put on her hat. Then turning round with a laugh which, to one in the secret, might have seemed to sound the coming-of-age of her maiden's fancy, "If you mean to be jealous," she said, "now is your time! I love Roger now with all my heart. I cannot do more!" She remained but a moment longer.

Roger's illness baffled the doctors, though the doctors were clever. For a fortnight it went from bad to worse. Nora remained constantly at home,

and played but a passive part to the little social drama enacted in Mrs. Keith's drawing-room. This lady had already cleared her stage and rung up her curtain. To the temporary indisposition of her young performer she resigned herself with that serene good grace which she had always at command, and which was so subtle an intermixture of kindness and shrewdness that it would have taken a wiser head than Nora's to discriminate them. She valued the young girl for her social uses ; but she spared her at this trying hour, just as an impresario, with an eye to the whole season, spares a prima donna who is threatened with bronchitis. Between these two, though there was little natural sympathy, there was a wondrous exchange of caresses and civilities. They had quietly judged each other and each sat serenely encamped in her estimate as in a strategical position. Nevertheless I would have trusted neither lady's account of the other. Nora, for perfect fairness, had too much to learn, and Mrs. Keith too much to unlearn. With her companion, however, she had unlearned much of that circumspect jealousy with which, in the interest of her remnant of youth and beauty, she taxed her commerce with most of the fashionable sisterhood. She strove to repair her one notable grievance against fate by treating Nora as a daughter. She mused with real maternal ardour upon the young girl's matrimonial possibilities, and among them upon that design of which Roger had dropped her a hint of old. He held to his purpose of course ; if he had fancied Nora then, he could but fancy her now.

But were his purpose and his fancy to be viewed with undiminished complacency ? What might have been a great prospect for Nora as a plain homeless child, was a small prospect for a young lady who was turning out one of the beauties of the day. Roger would be the best of husbands ; but in Mrs. Keith's

philosophy a very good husband might represent a very indifferent marriage. She herself had married a fool, but she had married well. Her easy, opulent widowhood was there to show it. To call things by their names, would Nora, in marrying Roger, marry money? Mrs. Keith desired to appraise the worldly goods of her rejected suitor. At the time of his suit she had the matter at her fingers' ends; but she suspected that since then he had been lining his pockets. He puzzled her; he had a way of seeming neither rich nor poor. When he spent largely, he had the air of a man straining a point; yet when he abstained, it seemed rather from taste than from necessity. She had been surprised more than once, while abroad, by his copious remittances to Nora. The point was worth making sure of. The reader will agree with me that her conclusion warranted her friend either a fool or a hero; for she graciously assumed that if, financially, Roger should be found wanting, she could easily prevail upon him to make way for a millionaire. She had several millionaires in her eye. Never was better evidence that Roger passed for a good fellow. In any event, however, Mrs. Keith had no favour to spare for Hubert and his marked and increasing "attentions." She had determined to beware of false alarms; but meanwhile she was vigilant. Hubert presented himself daily with a report of his cousin's condition,—a report most minute and exhaustive, seemingly, as a couple of hours were needed to make it. Nora, moreover, went frequently to her friend's house, wandered about aimlessly, and talked with Lucinda; and here Hubert, coming on the same errand, was sure to be found or to find her. Roger's malady had defined itself as virulent typhus fever; strength and reason were at the lowest ebb. Of course on these occasions Hubert walked home with the young girl; and as the autumn

weather made walking delightful, they chose the longest way. They might have been seen at this period perambulating in deep discourse certain outlying regions, the connexion of which with the main line of travel between Mrs. Keith's abode and Roger's was not immediately obvious. Apart from her prudent fears, Mrs. Keith had a scantier kindness for Hubert than for most brilliant men. "What is he, when you come to the point?" she impatiently demanded of a friend to whom she had imparted her fears. "He is neither fish nor flesh, neither a priest nor a layman. I like a clergyman to bring with him a little odour of sanctity,—something that rests you, after all your bother. Nothing is so pleasant, near the fire, at the sober end of one's drawing-room. If he doesn't fill a certain place, he is in the way. The Reverend Hubert is in any place and every place. His manners are neither of this world nor, I hope, of the next. Last night he let me bring him a cup of tea and sat lounging in his chair while I put it into his hand. O, he knows what he's about. He is pretentious, with all his nonchalance. He finds the prayer-book rather meagre fare for week-days; so he consoles himself with his pretty parishioners. To be a parishioner, you needn't go to his church."

But in spite of Mrs. Keith's sceptical criticism, these young persons played their game in their own way, with wider moves, even, and heavier stakes, than their shrewd hostess suspected. As Nora, for the present, declined all invitations, Mrs. Keith in the evening frequently went out alone, leaving her in the drawing-room to entertain Hubert Lawrence. Roger's illness furnished a grave undercurrent to their talk and gave it a tone of hazardous melancholy. Nora's young life had known no such hours as these. She hardly knew, perhaps, just what made them what they were. She hardly wished to know; she shrank



from breaking the charm with a question. The scenes of the past year had gathered into the background like a huge distant landscape, glowing with colour and swarming with life ; she seemed to stand with her friend in the shadow of a passing cloud, looking off into the mighty picture, caressing its fine outlines, and lingering where the haze of regret lay purple in its hollows. Hubert, meanwhile, told over the legends of town and tower, of hill and stream. Never, she fondly fancied, had a young couple conversed with less of narrow exclusiveness ; they took all history, all culture, into their confidence ; the radiant light of an immense horizon seemed to shine between them. Nora had felt perfectly satisfied ; she seemed to live equally in every need of her being, in soul and sense, in heart and mind. As for Hubert, he knew nothing, for the time, save that the angel was within his gates and must be treated to angelic fare. He had for the time the conscience, or the no-conscience, of a man who is feasting in Elysian meadows. He thought no evil ; he designed no harm ; the hard face of destiny was twisted into a smile. If only, for Hubert's sake, this had been an irresponsible world, without penalties to pay, without turnings to the longest lanes ! If the peaches and plums in the garden of pleasure had no cheeks but ripe ones, and if, when we have eaten the fruit, we had not to dispose of the stones ! Nora's charm of charms was a certain maidenly reserve which Hubert both longed and feared to abolish. While it soothed his conscience it irritated his ambition. He wished to know in what depth of water he stood ; but there was no tell-tale ripple in this tropic calm. Was he drifting in mid-ocean, or was he cruising idly among the sandy shallows ? As the days elapsed, he found his rest troubled by this folded rose-leaf of doubt ; for he was not used to being baffled by feminine riddles. He determined to pluck out the heart of the mystery.

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One evening, at Mrs. Keith's urgent request, Nora had prepared to go to the opera, as the season was to be very brief. Mrs. Keith was to dine with some friends and go thither in their company ; one of the ladies was to call for Nora after dinner, and they were to join the party at the theatre. In the afternoon there came to Mrs. Keith's a young German lady, a pianist of merit who had her way to make, a niece of Nora's regular professor, with whom Nora had an engagement to practise duets twice a week. It so happened that, owing to a violent rain, Miss Lilienthal had been unable to depart after their playing ; whereupon Nora had kept her to dinner, and the two, over their sweetbread, had sworn an eternal friendship. After dinner Nora went up to dress for the opera, and, on descending, found Hubert sitting by the fire deep in German discourse with the musical stranger. "I was afraid you would be going," said Hubert ; "I saw *Der Freyschutz* on the placards. Well, lots of pleasure ! Let me stay here awhile and polish up my German with Mademoiselle. It is great fun. And when the rain is over, Fraülein, perhaps you'll not mind my walking home with you."

But Mademoiselle was gazing in mute envy at Nora, standing before her in festal array. "She can take the carriage," said Nora, "when we have used it." And then reading the burden of that wistful regard—"Have you never heard *Der Freyschutz* ?"

"Often !" said the other, with a poignant smile.

Nora reflected a moment, then drew off her gloves. "You shall go, you shall take my place. I will stay at home. Your dress will do ; you shall wear my shawl. Let me put this flower into your hair, and here are my gloves and my fan. So ! You are charming. My gloves are large,—never mind. The others will be delighted to have you ; come to-morrow and tell me all about it." Nora's friend, in her carriage, was

already at the door. The gentle Fraülein, half shrinking, half eager, suffered herself to be hurried down to the carriage. On the doorstep she turned and kissed her hostess with a fervent "*Du allerliebste!*" Hubert wondered whether Nora's purpose had been to please her friend or to please herself. Was it that she preferred his society to Weber's music? He knew that she had a passion for Weber. "You have lost the opera," he said, when she reappeared; "but let us have an opera of our own. Play something; play Weber." So she played Weber for more than an hour; and I doubt whether, among the singers who filled the theatre with their melody, the master found that evening a truer interpreter than the young girl playing in the lamplit parlour to the man she loved. She played herself tired. "You ought to be extremely grateful," she said, as she struck the last chord; "I have never played so well."

Later they came to speak of a novel which lay on the table, and which Nora had been reading. "It is very silly," she said, "but I go on with it in spite of myself. I am afraid I am too easily pleased; no novel is so silly I can't read it. I recommend you this, by the way. The hero is a young clergyman, endowed with every charm, who falls in love with a Roman Catholic. She is rather a bigot, and though she loves the young man, she loves her religion better. To win his suit he comes near going over to Rome; but he pulls up short and determines the mountain shall come to Mahomet. He sets bravely to work, converts the young lady, baptizes her one week and marries her the next."

"Heaven preserve us, what a hotch-potch!" cried Hubert. "Is that what they are writing nowadays? I very seldom read a novel, but when I glance into one, I am sure to find some such stuff as that! Nothing irritates me so as the flatness of people's

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imagination. Common life,—I don't say it's a vision of bliss, but it's better than that. Their stories are like the underside of a carpet,—nothing but the stringy grain of the tissue,—a muddle of figures without shape and flowers without colour. When I read a novel my imagination starts off at a gallop and leaves the narrator hidden in a cloud of dust ; I have to come jogging twenty miles back to the dénouement. Your clergyman here with his Romish sweetheart must be a very poor creature. Why didn't he marry her first and convert her afterwards ? Isn't a clergyman after all, before all, a man ? I mean to write a novel about a priest who falls in love with a pretty Mahometan and swears by Allah to win her."

"O Hubert !" cried Nora, "would you like a clergyman to love a pretty Mahometan better than the truth ?"

"The truth ? A pretty Mahometan may be the truth. If you can get it in the concrete, after shivering all your days in the cold abstract, it's worth a bit of a compromise. Nora, Nora !" he went on, stretching himself back on the sofa and flinging one arm over his head, "I stand up for passion ! If a thing can take the shape of passion, that's a fact in its favour. The greater passion is the better cause. If my love wrestles with my faith, as the angel with Jacob, and if my love stands uppermost, I will admit it's a fair game. Faith is faith, under a hundred forms ! Upon my word, I should like to prove it. What a fraction of my personality is this clerical title ! How little it expresses ; how little it covers ! On Sundays, in the pulpit, I stand up and talk to five hundred people. Does each of them, think you, appropriate his five hundredth share of my discourse ? I can imagine talking to one person and saying five hundred times as much, even though she were a pretty

Mahometan or a prepossessing idolatress ! I can imagine being five thousand miles away from this blessed Boston,—in Turkish trousers, if you please, with a turban on my head and a chibouque in my mouth, with a great blue ball of Eastern sky staring in through the round window, high up ; all in perfect indifference to the fact that Boston was abusing or, worse still, forgetting me ! But, my dear Nora," Hubert added, suddenly, " don't let me introduce confusion into your ideas." And he left his sofa and came and leaned against the mantel-shelf. " This is between ourselves ; I talk to you as I would to no one else. Understand me and forgive me ! There are times when I must speak out and pay my respects to the possible, the ideal ! I must protest against the vulgar assumption of people who don't see beyond their noses ; that people who do, you and I for instance, are living up to the top of our capacity ; that we are contented, satisfied, balanced. I promise you I am not satisfied, not I ! I have room for more. I only half live ; I am like a purse filled at one end with small coin and empty at the other. Perhaps the other will never know the golden rattle ! The Lord's will be done ; I can say that with the best of them. But I shall never pretend that I have known happiness, that I have known life. On the contrary, I shall maintain I am a failure. I had the wit to see, but I lacked the courage to do,—and yet I have been called reckless, irreverent, audacious. My dear Nora, I am the veriest coward on earth ; pity me, if you don't despise me. There are men born to imagine things, others born to do them. Evidently I am not one of the doers. But I imagine things, I assure you ! "

Nora listened to this flow of sweet unreason without staying her hand in the work, which, as she perceived the drift of his talk, she had rapidly caught

up, but with a beating heart and a sense of rising tears. It was a ravishing mixture of passion and reason, the agony of a restless soul. Of old, she had thought of Hubert's nature as immutably placid and fixed ; it gave her the notion of lucid depth and soundless volume. But of late, with greater nearness, she had seen the ripples on its surface and heard it beating its banks. This was not the first time ; but the waves had never yet broken so high ; she had never felt their salt spray on her cheeks. The touch of it now was delicious. She went on with her work, mechanically taking her stitches. She felt Hubert's intense blue eyes ; the little blue flower in her tapestry grew under her quick needle. A door had suddenly been opened between their hearts ; she passed through it. "What is it you imagine," she asked, with intense curiosity ; "what is it you dream of doing ?"

"I dream," he said, "of breaking some law for your sake !"

The answer frightened her ; passion was outstripping reason. What had she to do with broken laws ? She trembled and rolled up her work. "I dream," she said, trying to smile, "of the beauty of keeping laws. I expect to get a deal of pleasure from it yet." And she left her chair. For an instant Hubert was confused. Was this the last struggle which precedes submission, or the mere prudence of indifference ? Nora's eyes were on the clock. It rang out **eleven**. "To begin with," she said, "let me keep the **law** of going early to bed. Good-night !"

Hubert wondered ; he hardly knew whether this was a rebuke or a challenge. "You will at least shake hands," he said reproachfully.

She had meant in self-defence to omit this ceremony, but she let him take her hand. Hubert gazed at her a moment and raised it to his lips. She blushed,

and rapidly withdrew it. "There!" cried Hubert, "I have broken a law!"

"Much good may it do you!" she answered, and went her way. He stood for a moment, waiting, and fancying, rather fatuously, that she might come back. Then, as he took up his hat, he wondered whether she too was not a bit of a coquette.

Nora wondered on her own side whether this scene had not been a little pre-arranged. For a day love and doubt fared in company. Lucinda's mournful discourse on the morrow was not of a nature to restore her calmness. "Last night," said Roger's nurse, "he was very bad. He woke up out of his stupor, but he was none the better for that. He talked all night about you. If he murmurs a word, it's always your name. He asked a dozen times if you had arrived, and forgot as often as I told him,—he, dear man, who used to remember the very hairs of your head. He kept wondering whether anything had happened to you. Late in the evening, when the carriages began to pass, he cried out that each of them was you, and what would you think of him for not coming to meet you? 'Don't tell her how bad I am,' he says; 'I must have been in bed two or three days, haven't I, Lucinda? Say I shall be out to-morrow; that I have only a little cold. Hubert will do everything for her,' he kept saying. And then when, at midnight, the wind began to blow, he declared it was a storm, that your ship was on the coast. God keep you safe, he cried. Then he asked if you were changed and grown; were you pretty, were you tall, should he know you? And he took the hand-glass and looked at himself and wondered if you would know him. He cried out that he was ugly, he was horrible, you would hate him. He bade me bring him his dressing things so that he might make himself look better, and when I wouldn't, he began to rage

and call me names, and then he broke down and cried like a child." Hearing these things, Nora prayed intently for Roger's recovery,—prayed that he might live to see her more cunningly and lovingly his debtor. She wished to do something, she hardly knew what, not only to prove, but for ever to commemorate, her devotion. She felt capable of erecting a monument of self-sacrifice. Her conscience was perfectly at rest.

For a couple of days she saw nothing of Hubert. On the third there came excellent news of Roger, who had taken a marked turn for the better, and had passed the crisis. She had declined, for the evening, a certain attractive invitation; but on the receipt of these tidings she revoked her refusal. Coming down to the drawing-room with Mrs. Keith, dressed and shawled, she found Hubert in waiting, with a face which uttered bad news. Roger's improvement had been momentary, a relapse had followed, and he was worse than ever. She tossed off her shawl with an energy not unnoted by her duenna. "Of course I cannot go," she said. "It is neither possible nor proper." Mrs. Keith would have given her biggest bracelet that this thing should not have happened in just this way; but she submitted with a good grace,—for a duenna. Hubert went down with her to her carriage. At the foot of the stairs she stopped, and while gathering up her skirts, "Mr. Lawrence," she demanded, "are you going to remain here?"

"A little while," said Hubert, with his imperturbable smile.

"A very little while, I hope." She had been wondering whether admonition would serve as a check or a stimulus. "I need hardly tell you that the young lady upstairs is not a person to be trifled with."



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"I hardly know what you mean," said Hubert.  
"Am I a person to trifle?"

"Is it serious, then?"

Hubert hesitated a moment. She perceived a sudden watchful quiver in his eye, like a sword turned edge outward. She unsheathed one of her own steely beams, and for the tenth of a second there was a dainty crossing of blades. "I admire Miss Lambert," cried Hubert, "with all my heart."

"True admiration," said Mrs. Keith, "is one half respect and the other half self-denial."

Hubert laughed, ever so politely. "I will put that into a sermon," he said.

"O, I have a sermon to preach you," she answered.  
"Take your hat and go."

He looked very grave: "I will go up and get my hat." Mrs. Keith, catching his eye as he closed the carriage door, wished to Heaven that she had held her tongue. "I have done him injustice," she murmured as she went. "I have fancied him light, but I see he's vicious." Hubert, however, kept his promise in so far as that he did take up his hat. Having held it a moment he put it down. He had reckoned without his hostess! Nora was seated by the fire, with her bare arms folded, with a downcast brow. Dressed in pale corn-colour, her white throat confined by a band of blue velvet overstitched with a dozen pearls, she was not a subject for summary farewells. Meeting her eyes, he saw they were filled with tears. "You must not take this thing too hard," he said.

For a moment she answered nothing; then she bent her face into her hands and her tears flowed.  
"O poor; poor Roger!" she cried.

Hubert watched her weeping in her ball-dress those primitive tears. "I have not given him up," he said at last. "But suppose I had——" She raised her

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head and looked at him. "O," he cried, "I should have a hundred things to say! Both as a clergyman and as a man, I should preach resignation. In this crisis, let me speak my mind. Roger is part of your childhood; your childhood's at an end. Possibly, with it he too is to go! At all events you are not to feel that in losing him you lose everything. I protest! As you sit here he belongs to your past. Ask yourself what part he may play in your future. Believe me, you will have to settle it, you will have to choose. Here, in any case, *your* life begins. Your tears are for the dead past; this is the future, with its living needs. Roger's fate is only one of them."

She rose with her tears replaced by a passionate gravity. "Ah, you don't know what you say!" she cried. "Talk of my future if you like, but not of my past! No one can speak of it, no one knows it! Such as you see me here, bedecked and bedizened, I am a penniless, homeless, friendless creature! But for Roger, I might be in the streets! Do you think I have forgotten it, that I ever can forget it? There are things that colour one's life, memories that last for ever. I have my share! What am I to settle, between whom am I to choose? My love for Roger is no choice, it is part and parcel of my being!"

Hubert was inspired; he forgot everything but that she was lovely. "I wish to Heaven," he cried, "that you had never ceased to be penniless and friendless! I wish Roger had left you alone and not smothered you beneath this terrible burden of gratitude! Give him back his gifts! Take all I have! In the streets? In the streets I should have found you, as lovely in your poverty as you are now in your finery, and a thousand times more free!" He seized her hand and met her eyes with irresistible ardour. Pain and pleasure, at once, possessed Nora's heart. It was as if joy, bursting in, had trampled

certain tender flowers that bloomed on the threshold. But Hubert had cried, "I love you! I love you!" and joy had taken up the words. She was unable to speak audibly; but in an instant she was spared the effort. The servant hastily came in with a note superscribed with her name. She motioned to Hubert to open it. He read it aloud. "Mr. Lawrence is sinking. You had better come. I send my carriage." Nora's voice came to her with a cry,— "He is dying, he is dying!"

In a minute's time she found herself wrapped in her shawl and seated with Hubert in the doctor's coupé. A few moments more and the doctor received them at the door of Roger's room. They passed in, and Nora went straight to the bed. Hubert stood an instant and saw her drop on her knees beside the pillow. She flung back her shawl with vehemence, as if to release her arms; she was throwing them round her friend. Hubert went on into the adjoining chamber, of which the door stood open. The room was dark, the other lit by a night-lamp. He stood listening awhile, but heard nothing; then he began to walk slowly to and fro, past the doorway. He could see nothing but the shining train of Nora's dress lying on the carpet beyond the angle of the bed. He wanted terribly to see more, but he feared to see too much. At moments he thought he heard whispers. This lasted some time; then the doctor came in, with what seemed to him an odd, unprofessional smile. "The young lady knows a few remedies not taught in the schools," he whispered. "He has recognised her. He is good for to-night, at least. Half an hour ago he had no pulse at all, but this has started it. I will come back in an hour." After he had gone Lucinda came, self-commissioned, and shut the door in Hubert's face. He stood a moment, with an unreasoned sense of insult and defeat.

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Then he walked straight out of the house. But the next morning, after breakfast, a more generous sentiment moved him to return. The doctor was just coming away. "It was a Daniel come to judgement," the doctor declared. "I verily believe she saved him. He will be sitting up in a fortnight." Hubert learned that, having achieved her miracle, Nora had returned to Mrs. Keith's. What arts she had used he was left to imagine. He had still a sore feeling of having just missed a crowning joy; but there might yet be time to grasp it. He felt, too, an urgent need of catching a glimpse of the afterglow of Nora's mystical effluence. He repaired to Mrs. Keith's, hoping to find the young girl alone. But the elder lady, as luck would have it, was established in the drawing-room, and she made haste to inform him that Nora, fatigued by her "watching," had not yet left her room. But if Hubert was sombre, Mrs. Keith was radiant. Now was her chance to preach her promised sermon; she had just come into possession of facts that furnished a capital text.

"I suppose you will call me a meddling busybody," she said. "I confess I seem to myself a model of forbearance. Be so good as to tell me in three words whether you are in love with Nora."

Taken thus abruptly to task, Hubert, after a moment's trepidation, kept his balance. He measured the situation at a glance, and pronounced it bad. But if heroic urbanity would save it, he would be urbane. "It is hardly a question to answer in two words," he answered, with an ingenuous smile. "I wish you could tell me!"

"Really," said Mrs. Keith, "it seems to me that by this time you might know. Tell me at least whether you are prepared to marry her?"

Hubert hesitated just an instant. "Of course not, —so long as I am not sure I am in love with her!"

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"And pray when will you make up your mind? And what is to become of poor Nora meanwhile?"

"Why, Mrs. Keith, if Nora can wait, surely you can." The urbanity need not be all on his side.

"Nora can wait? That's easily said. Is a young girl a thing to be tried like a piano,—to be strummed on for a pretty tune? O Mr. Lawrence, if I had ever doubted of the selfishness of men! What this matter has been for you, you know best yourself; but I may tell you that for Nora it has been serious." At these words Hubert passed his hand nervously through his hair and walked to the window. "The miserable fop!" said Mrs. Keith privately. "His vanity is the only thing that has ears. It is very true they are long ones! If you are not able to make Nora a handsome offer of marriage," she proceeded, "you have no business here. Retire, quietly, expeditiously, humbly. Leave Nora to me. I will heal her bruises. They shall have been wholesome ones."

Hubert felt that these peremptory accents implied a menace, and that the lady spoke by book. His vanity rankled, but discretion drew a long breath. For a fortnight it had been shut up in a closet. He thanked his stars they had no witnesses; from Mrs. Keith, for once, he could afford to take a lesson. He remained silent for a moment, with his brow bent in meditation. Then turning suddenly, he faced the music. "Mrs. Keith," he said, "you have done me a service. I thank you sincerely. I have gone further than I meant; I admit it. I am selfish, I am vain, I am anything you please. My only excuse is Nora's loveliness. It had made an ass of me; I had forgotten that this is a life of logic." And he bravely took up his hat.

Mrs. Keith was prepared for a "scene"; she was annoyed at missing it, and her easy triumph led her on. She thought, too, of the young girl upstairs,

combing out her golden hair, and seeing no logic in her looking-glass. She had dragged a heavy gun to the front ; she determined to fire her shot. So much virtue had never inspired her with so little respect. She played a moment with the bow on her morning-dress. " Let me thank you for your great humility," she said. " Do you know I was going to be afraid of you, so that I had entrenched myself behind a great big preposterous fact ? I met, last evening, Mrs. Chatterton of New York. You know she's a great talker, but she talks to the point. She mentioned your engagement to a certain young lady, a dark-eyed person,—need I repeat the name ? " There was no need of her repeating names ; Hubert stood before her, flushing crimson, with his blue eyes flashing cold wrath. He remained silent a moment, shaking a scornful finger at her. " For shame, madam," he cried. " That's in shocking taste ! You might have been generous ; it seems to me I deserve it." And with a summary bow he departed.

Mrs. Keith repented of this extra touch of zeal ; the more so as she found that, practically, Nora was to be the victim of the young man's displeasure. For four days he gave no sign ; Nora was left to explain his absence as she might. Even Roger's amendment failed to console her. At last, as the two ladies were sitting at lunch, his card was brought in, superscribed *P.P.C.* Nora read it in silence, and for a moment rested her eyes on her companion with a piteous look which seemed to ask, " Is it *you* I have to thank for this ? " A torrent of remonstrances rose to Nora's lips, but they were scaled by the reflexion that, though her friend might have been concerned in Hubert's desertion, its peculiar abruptness had a peculiar motive. She pretended to occupy herself with her plate ; but her self-control was rapidly ebbing. She silently rose and retreated to her own

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room, leaving Mrs. Keith moralising, over her mutton-chop, upon the miseries of young-ladyhood and the immeasurable egotism of the man who would rather produce a cruel effect than none at all. For a week after this Nora was seriously ill. On the day she left her room she received a short note from Hubert.

NEW YORK.

DEAR NORA—You have, I suppose, been expecting to hear from me ; but I have not written, because I am unable to write as I wish and unwilling to write as—other people would wish ! I left Boston suddenly, but not unadvisedly. I shall for the present be occupied here. The last month I spent there will remain one of the best memories of my life. But it was time it should end ! Remember me a little—what do I say ?—forget me ! Farewell. I received this morning from the doctor the best accounts of Roger.

Nora handled this letter somewhat as one may imagine a pious maiden of the antique world to have treated a messenger from the Delphic oracle. It was obscure, it was even sinister ; but deep in its sacred dimness there seemed to glow a fiery particle of truth. She locked it up in her dressing-case and wondered and waited. Shortly after came a missive of a different cast. It was from her cousin, George Fenton, and also dated New York.

DEAR NORA—You have left me to find out your return in the papers. I saw your name a month ago in the steamer's list. But I hope the fine people and things you have been seeing haven't driven me quite out of your heart,—that you remember at least who I am. I received your answer to my letter of last February ; after which I immediately wrote again, but in vain ! Perhaps you never got my letter ; I could scarcely decipher your Italian address. Excuse my want of learning ! Your photograph is a joy for ever. Are you really as handsome as that ? It taxes even

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the credulity of one who knows how pretty you used to be ; how good you must be still. When I last wrote I told you of my having taken stock in an enterprise for working over refuse iron. But what do you care for refuse iron ? It's awfully dirty, and not fit to be talked of to a fine lady like you. Still, if you have any odd bits,—old keys, old nails,—the smallest contributions thankfully received ! We think there is money in it ; if there isn't, I'm afloat again. If this fails, I think of going to Texas. I wish I might see you first. Get Mr. Lawrence to bring you to New York for a week. I suppose it wouldn't do for me to call on you in the light of day ; but I might hang round your hotel and see you going in and out. Does he love me as much as ever, Mr. Lawrence ? Poor man, tell him to take it easy ; I shall never trouble him again. Are you ever lonely in the midst of your grandeur ? Do you ever feel that, after all, these people are not of your blood and bone ? I should like you to quarrel with them, to know a day's friendlessness or a day's freedom, so that you might remember that here in New York, in a dusty iron-yard, there is a poor devil who is your natural protector.



## VIII

ROGER'S convalescence went smoothly forward. One morning as he lay coquetting deliciously with returning sense, he became aware that a woman was sitting at his window in the sun. She seemed to be reading. He fancied vaguely that she was Lucinda ; but at last it occurred to him that Lucinda was not addicted to literature, and that Lucinda's tresses, catching the light, were not of a kind to take on the likeness of a queenly crown. She was no vision ; his visions had been dark and troubled ; and this image was radiant and fixed. He half closed his eyes and watched her lazily through the lids. There came to him, out of his boyish past, a vague, delightful echo of the " Arabian Nights." The room was gilded by the autumn sunshine into the semblance of an enamelled harem court ; he himself seemed a languid Persian, lounging on musky cushions ; the fair woman at the window a Scheherazade, a Badoura. He closed his eyes completely and gave a little groan, to see if she would move. When he opened them, she had moved ; she stood near his bed, looking at him. For a moment his puzzled gaze still told him nothing but that she was fictitiously fair. She smiled and smiled, and, after a little, as he only stared confusedly, she blushed, not like Badoura or Scheherazade, but like Nora. Her frequent presence after this became the great fact in his convalescence. The thought of her beauty

filled the long empty hours during which he was forbidden to do anything but grow strong. Sometimes he wondered whether his impression of it was only part of the universal optimism of a man with a raging appetite. Then he would question Lucinda, who would shake her head and chuckle with elderly archness. "Wait till you are on your feet, sir, and judge for yourself," she would say. "Go and call on her at Mrs. Keith's, and then tell me what you think." He grew well with a beating heart; he would have stayed his recovery for the very dread of facing his happiness. But at last, one Sunday, he discarded his dressing-gown and sat up, clothed and in his right mind. The effort, of course, gave him a huge appetite, and he dealt vigorous justice upon his luncheon. He had just finished, and his little table was still in position near his arm-chair, when Nora made her appearance. She had been to church, and on leaving church had taken a long walk. She wore one of those dark rich toilets of early winter that are so becoming to fair beauties; but her face lacked freshness; she was pale and tired. On Roger's remarking it, she said the service had given her a headache; as a remedy, she had marched off briskly at haphazard, missed her way, and wandered hither and thither. But here she was, safe and sound and hungry. She asked for a share of Roger's luncheon, and, taking off her bonnet, was bountifully served at his table. She ate largely and hungrily, jesting at her appetite and getting back her colour. Roger leaned back in his chair, watching her, carving her partridge, offering her this and that; in a word, falling in love. It happened as naturally as if he had never allowed for it. The flower of her beauty had bloomed in a night, that of his passion in a day. When at last she laid down her fork, and, sinking back in her chair, folded her hands on her arms and sat facing him with a

friendly, pointless, satisfied smile, and then, raising her goblet, threw back her head and showed her white throat and glanced at him over the brim, while he noted her plump ringless hand, with the little finger curled out, he felt that he was in health again. She strolled about the room, idly touching the instruments on his dressing-table and the odds and ends on his chimney-piece. Her dress, which she had released from the loops and festoons then in fashion, trailed rustling on the carpet, and lent her a sumptuous, ladyish air which seemed to give a price to this domiciliary visit. "Everywhere, everywhere, a little dust," she said. "I see it is more than time I should be back here. I have been waiting for you to invite me; but as you don't seem inclined, I invite myself."

Roger said nothing for a moment. Then with a blush, "I don't mean to invite you; I don't want you."

Nora stared. "Don't want me? *Par exemple!*"

"I want you as a visitor, but not as a——" And he fumbled for his word.

"As a resident?" She took it gaily. "You turn me out of doors?"

"No; I don't take you in—yet awhile. My dear child, I have a reason."

Nora wondered, still smiling. "I might consider this very unkind," she said, "if I had not the patience of an angel. Would you kindly mention your reason?"

"Not now," he answered. "But never fear, when it comes it will be all-sufficient!" But he imparted it, a couple of days after, to Mrs. Keith, who came late in the afternoon to present her compliments on his recovery. She displayed an almost sisterly graciousness, enhanced by a lingering spice of coquetry; but somehow, as she talked, he felt as if she were an old woman and he still a young man. It seemed a sort of hearsay that they should ever

have been mistress and lover. "Nora will have told you," he said, "of my wishing you kindly to keep her awhile longer. I can give you no better proof of my regard, for the fact is, my dear friend, I am in love with her."

"Come!" she cried. "This is interesting."

"I wish her to accept me freely, as she would accept any other man. For that purpose I must cease to be, in all personal matters, her guardian."

"She must herself forget her wardship, if there is to be any sentimentalising between you,—all but forget it, at least. Let me speak frankly," she went on. Whereupon Roger frowned a bit, for he had known her frankness to be somewhat incisive. "It is all very well that you should be in love with her. You are not the first. Don't be frightened; your chance is fair. The needful point is that she should be just the least bit in love with you."

He shook his head with melancholy modesty. "I don't expect that. She loves me, a little, I hope; but I say nothing to her imagination. Circumstances are fatally against it. If she falls in love, it will be with a man as unlike me as possible. Nevertheless, I do hope she may, without pain, learn to think of me as a husband. I hope," he cried, with appealing eyes, "that she may see a certain rough propriety in it. After all, who can make her such a husband as I? I am neither handsome, nor clever, nor accomplished, nor celebrated. She might choose from a dozen men who are. Pretty lovers doubtless they would make; but, my friend, it's the *husband*, the husband, that is the test!" And he beat his clenched hand on his knee. "Do they know her, have they watched her, as I have done? What are their months to my years, their vows to my acts? Mrs. Keith!"—and he grasped her hand as if to call her to witness,—“I undertake to make her happy. I

know what you can say,—that a woman's happiness is worth nothing unless imagination lends a hand. Well, even as a lover, perhaps I am not a hopeless case! And then, I confess, other things being equal, I would rather Nora should not marry a poor man."

Mrs. Keith spoke, on this hint. "You are a rich one, then?"

Roger folded up his pocket-handkerchief and patted it out on his knee, with pregnant hesitation. "Yes, I am rich,—I may call it so. I am rich!" he repeated with unction. "I can say it at last." He paused a moment, and then, with unstudied irony,— "I was not altogether a pauper when you refused me. Since then, for the last six years, I have been saving and sparing and counting. My purpose has sharpened my wits, and fortune, too, has favoured me. I have speculated a little, I have handled stock and turned this and that about, and now I can offer my wife a very pretty fortune. It has been going on very quietly; people don't know it; but Nora, if she cares to, shall show them!" Mrs. Keith coloured and mused; she was lost in a tardy afterthought. "It seems odd to be talking to you this way," Roger went on, exhilarated by this summing-up of his career. "Do you remember that letter of mine from P——?"

"I did not tear it up in a rage," she answered. "I came across it the other day."

"It was rather odd, my writing it, you know," Roger confessed. "But in my sudden desire to register a vow, I needed a friend. I turned to you as my best friend." Mrs. Keith acknowledged the honour with a toss of her head. Had she made a mistake of old? She very soon decided that Nora should not repeat it. Her hand-shake, as she left her friend, was generous; it seemed to assure him that he might count upon her.

When, soon after, he made his appearance in her drawing-room, she gave him many a hint as to how to play his cards. But he irritated her by his slowness ; he was too circumspect by half. It was only in the evening that he took a hand in the game. During the day he left Nora to her own affairs, and was in general neither more nor less attentive than if he had been a merely susceptible stranger. To spectators his present relation with the young girl was somewhat puzzling ; though Mrs. Keith, by no ambiguous giving out, as Hamlet says, had diffused a sympathetic expectancy. Roger wondered again and again whether Nora had guessed his meaning. He observed in her at times, as he fancied, a sort of nervous levity which seemed born of a need to conjure away the phantom of sentiment. And of this hostile need, of course, he hereupon strove to trace the lineage. He talked with her little, as yet, and never interfered in her talk with others ; but he watched her devotedly from corners, and caught her words through the hum of voices. Sometimes she looked at him as if she were on the point of telling him something. What had she to tell him ? In trying to guess, Roger made up his mind that she was in love. Search as he could, however, he was unable to find her lover. It was no one there present ; they were all alike wasting their shot ; the enemy had stolen a march and was hidden in the very heart of the citadel. He appealed distractedly to Mrs. Keith. " Lovesick,— lovesick is the word," he groaned. " I have read of it all my days in the poets, but here it is in the flesh. The poor girl plays her part well ; she's wound up tight ; but the spring will snap and the watch run down. D——n the man ! I would rather he carried her off than sit and see this." He saw that his friend had bad news. " Tell me everything," he said ; " don't spare me."

"You have noticed it at last," she answered. "I was afraid you would. Well! he's not far to seek. Think it over; can't you guess? My dear Mr. Lawrence, you are celestially simple. Your cousin Hubert is not."

"Hubert!" Roger echoed, staring. A spasm passed over his face; his eyes flashed. At last he hung his head. "Dear, dear," he said; "have I done it all for Hubert?"

"Not if I can help it!" cried Mrs. Keith sharply. "She may not marry you; but, at the worst, she shall not marry him!"

Roger laid his hand on her arm; first heavily, then gently. "Dear friend, she must be happy, at any cost. If she loves Hubert, she must marry him. I will settle an income!"

Mrs. Keith gave his knuckles a great rap with her fan. "You will settle a fiddlestick! You will keep your money and you will marry Miss Nora. Leave it to me! If you have no regard for your rights, at least I have."

"Rights? what rights have I? I might have let her alone. I needn't have settled down on her in this deadly fashion. But Hubert's a happy man! Does he know it? You must write to him. I can't!"

Mrs. Keith burst into a ringing laugh. "Know it? You are amazing! Hadn't I better telegraph?"

Roger stared and frowned. "Does he suspect it, then?"

Mrs. Keith rolled up her eyes. "Come," she said, "we must begin at the beginning. When you speak of your cousin, you open up a gulf. There is not much in it, it's true; but it's a gulf. Your cousin is a humbug,—neither more nor less. Allow me; I know what I say. He knew, of course, of your plans for Nora?" Roger nodded. "Of course he did! He took his chance, therefore, while you were well

out of the way. He lost no time, and if Nora is in love with him, he can tell you why. He knew that he could not marry her, that he should not, that he would not. But he made love to her, to pass the time. Happily, it passed soon. I had of course to be cautious ; but as soon as I saw how things were going, I spoke, and spoke to the point. Though he's a humbug, he is not a fool ; that was all he needed. He made his excuses, such as they were ! I shall know in future what to think of him."

Roger shook his head mournfully. " I am afraid it's not to be so easily settled. As you say, Hubert's a gulf. I never sounded it. The fact remains that they love each other. It's hard, but it's fatal."

Mrs. Keith lost patience. " Don't try the heroic ; you will break down," she cried. " You are the best of men, but after all you are human. To begin with, Hubert doesn't love her. He loves no one but himself. Nora must find her happiness where women as good have found it before this, in a sound, sensible marriage. She cannot marry Hubert ; he is engaged to another person. Yes, I have the facts ; a young girl in New York with whom he has been off and on for a couple of years, but who holds him to his bargain. I wish her joy of it ! He is not to be pitied ; she is not Nora, but she is extremely fond of him, and she is to have money. So good-bye to Hubert. As for you, cut the knot ! She's a bit sentimental just now ; but one sentiment, at that age, is as good as another. And, my dear man, the girl has a conscience, it's to be hoped ; give her a chance to show it. A word to the wise ! "

Thus exhorted, Roger determined to act. The next day was a Sunday. While the ladies were at church he took up his position in their drawing-room. Nora came in alone ; Mrs. Keith had made a pretext for ascending to her own room, where she waited with



some solemnity. "I am glad to find you," Nora said. "I have been wanting particularly to speak to you. Is my probation not over? May not I now come back?"

"It's about that," he answered, "that I came to talk to you. The probation has been mine. Has it lasted long enough? Do you love me yet? Come back to me,—come back to me as my wife."

She looked at him, as he spoke, with a clear, unfrightened gaze, and, with his last words, broke frankly into a laugh. But as his own face was intensely grave, a gradual blush arrested her laugh. "Your wife, Roger?" she asked gently.

"My wife. I offer you my hand. Dear Nora, is it so incredible?"

To his uttermost meaning, somehow, her ear was still closed; she still took it as a jest. "Is that the only condition on which we can live together?" she asked.

"The only one,—for me!"

She looked at him, still sounding his eyes with her own. But his passion, merciful still, retreated before her frank doubt. "Ah," she said, smiling, "what a pity I have grown up!"

"Well," he said, "since you are grown we must make the best of it. Think of it, Nora, think of it. I am not so old, you know. I was young when we began. You know me so well; you would be safe. It would simplify matters vastly; it's at least worth thinking of," he went on, pleading for very tenderness, in this pitiful minor key. "I know it must seem odd; but I make you the offer!"

Nora was almost shocked. In this strange new character of a lover she seemed to see him eclipsed as a friend, now when, in the trouble of her love, she turned longingly to friendship. She was silent awhile, with her embarrassment. "Dear Roger,"

she answered, at last, "let me love you in the old, old way. Why need we change? Nothing is so good, so safe as that. I thank you from my heart for your offer. You have given me too much already. Marry any woman you please, and I will be her serving-maid."

He had no heart to meet her eyes; he had wrought his own fate. Mechanically, he took up his hat and turned away, without speaking. She looked at him an instant, uncertain, and then, loath to part with him so abruptly, she laid her arm round his neck. "You don't think me unkind?" she said. "I will do anything for you on earth"—*but that* was unspoken, yet Roger heard it. The dream of years was shattered; he felt sick; he was dumb. "You forgive me?" she went on. "O Roger, Roger!" and, with a strange inconsequence of lovingness, she dropped her head on his shoulder. He held her for a moment as close as he had held his hope, and then released her as suddenly as he had parted with it. Before she knew it, he was gone.

Nora drew a long breath. It had all come and gone so fast that she was bewildered. It had been what she had heard called a "chance." Suppose she had grasped at it? She felt a kind of relief in the thought that she had been wise. That she had been cruel, she never suspected. She watched Roger, from the window, cross the street and take his way up the sunny slope. Two ladies passed him, friends, as Nora saw; but he made no bow. Suddenly Nora's reflexions deepened and the scene became portentous. If she had been wrong, she had been horribly wrong. She hardly dared to think of it. She ascended to her own room, to take counsel of familiar privacy. In the hall, as she passed, she found Mrs. Keith at her open door. This lady put her arm round her waist, led her into the chamber toward the light.

"Something has happened," she said, looking at her curiously.

"Yes, I have had an offer of marriage. From Roger."

"Well, well?" Mrs. Keith was puzzled by her face.

"Isn't it kind of him? To think he should have thought it necessary! It was soon settled."

"Settled, dearest? How?"

"Why—why——" And Nora began to smile the more resolutely, as her imagination had taken alarm. "I declined."

Mrs. Keith released her with a gesture almost tragical. "Declined? Unhappy girl!" The words were charged with a righteous indignation so unusual to the speaker that Nora's conscience took the hint.

She turned very pale. "What have I done?" she asked appealingly.

"Done, my dear? You have done a blind, cruel act! Look here." And Mrs. Keith having hastily ransacked a drawer, turned about with an open letter. "Read that and repent."

Nora took the letter; it was old and crumpled, the ink faded. She glanced at the date,—that of her first school year. In a moment she had read to the closing sentence. "It will be my own fault if I have not a perfect wife." In a moment more its heavy meaning overwhelmed her; its vital spark flashed back over the interval of years. She seemed to see Roger's bent, stunned head in the street. Mrs. Keith was frightened at her work. Nora dropped the letter and stood staring, open-mouthed, pale as death, with her poor young face blank with horror.

## IX

NORA frequently wondered in after years how that Sunday afternoon had worked itself away ; how, through the tumult of amazement and grief, decision, illumination, action, had finally come. She had dis-embarrassed herself of a vague attempt of Mrs. Keith's towards some compensatory caress, and making her way half blindly to her own room, had sat down face to face with her trouble. Here, if ever, was thunder from a clear sky. Her friend's disclosure took time to swell to its full magnitude ; for an hour she sat, half stunned, seeming to see it climb heaven-high and glare upon her like some monstrous blighting sun. Then at last she broke into a cry and wept. Her immense pain gushed and filtered through her heart, and passed out in shuddering sobs. The whole face of things was hideously altered ; a sudden horror had sprung up in her innocent past, and it seemed to fling forward a shadow which made the future a blank darkness. She felt cruelly deluded and injured ; the sense of suffered wrong absorbed for the time the thought of wrong inflicted. She was too weak for indignation, but she overflowed with delicate resentment. That Roger, whom all these years she had fancied as simple as charity, should have been as double as interest, should have played a part and laid a train, that she had been living in darkness, on illusion and lies, all this was an intolerable thing. And the

worst was that she had been cheated of the chance to be really loyal. Why had he never told her that she wore a chain? Why, when he took her, had he not drawn up his terms and made his bargain? She would have kept the bargain to the letter; she would have taught herself to be his wife. Duty then would have been duty; sentiment would have been sentiment; her youth would not have been so wretchedly mis-spent. She would have given up her heart betimes; doubtless it would have learned to beat to a decent and satisfied measure; but now it had throbbed to a finer music, a melody that would ring in her ears for ever. Thinking of what her conscience might have done, however, brought her to thinking of what it might still do. While she turned in her pain, angrily questioning it, Mrs. Keith knocked at the door. Nora repaired to the dressing-glass, to efface the traces of her tears; and while she stood there, she saw in her open dressing-case her last letter from her cousin. It gave her the help she was vaguely groping for. By the time she had crossed the room and opened the door she had welcomed and blessed this help; and while she gravely shook her head in response to Mrs. Keith's softly urgent, "Nora, dear, won't you let me come to you?" she had passionately made it her own. "I would rather be alone," she said; "I thank you very much."

It was past six o'clock; Mrs. Keith was dressed for the evening. It was her gracious practice on Sundays to dine with her mother-in-law. Nora knew, therefore, that if her companion accepted this present dismissal, she would be alone for several hours.

"Can't I do something for you?" Mrs. Keith inquired soothingly.

"Nothing at all, thank you. You are very kind."

Mrs. Keith looked at her, wondering whether this was the irony of bitter grief; but a certain cold calm-

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ness in the young girl's face, overlying her agitation, seemed to intimate that she had taken a wise resolve. And, in fact, Nora was now soaring sublime on the wings of purpose, and viewed Mrs. Keith's offence as a diminished fact. Mrs. Keith took her hands. "Write him a line, my dear," she gently urged.

Nora nodded. "Yes, I will write him a line."

"And when I come back, it will be all over?"

"Yes,—all over."

"God bless you, my dear." And on this theological amenity the two women kissed and separated. Nora returned to her dressing-case and read over her cousin's letter. Its clear friendliness seemed to ring out audibly amid this appalling hush of familiar harmony. "I wish you might know a day's friendlessness or a day's freedom,—a poor devil who is your natural protector." Here was indeed the voice of nature, of predestined tenderness; if her cousin had been there Nora would have flung herself into his arms. She sat down at her writing-table, with her brow in her hands, light-headed with her passionate purpose, steadying herself to think. A day's freedom had come at last; a lifetime's freedom confronted her. For, as you will have guessed, immediate retrocession and departure had imperiously prescribed themselves. Until this had taken place, there could be nothing but deeper trouble. On the old terms there could be no clearing up; she could speak to Roger again only in perfect independence. She must throw off those suffocating bounties which had been meant to bribe her to the service in which she had so miserably failed. Her failure now she felt no impulse to question, her decision no energy to revise. I shall have told my story ill if these things seem to lack logic. The fault lay deeper and dated from longer ago than her morning's words of denial. Roger and she shared it between them; it was a heavy burden for both.

She wrote her "line," as she had promised Mrs. Keith, rapidly, without erasure ; then wrote another to Mrs. Keith, folded and directed them and laid them on her dressing-table. She remembered now, distinctly, that she had heard of a Sunday-evening train to New York. She hastened downstairs, found in a newspaper the railway advertisement, and learned that the train started at eight ; satisfied herself, too, that the coast was clear of servants, and that she might depart unquestioned. She bade a gleeful farewell to her borrowed possessions,—unearned wages, ineffective lures. She exchanged the dress she had worn to church for an old black silk one, put a few articles of the first necessity into a small travelling-bag, and emptied her purse of all save a few dollars. Then bonneted, shawled, veiled, with her bag in her hand, she went forth into the street. She would begin as she would have to proceed ; she started for the station, savingly, on foot. Happily it was not far off ; she reached it through the wintry darkness, out of breath, but in safety. She seemed to feel about her, as she went, the old Bohemianism of her childhood ; she was once more her father's daughter. She bought her ticket, and found a seat in the train without adventure ; with a sort of shame, in fact, that this great deed of hers should be so easy to do. But as the train rattled hideously through the long wakeful hours of the night, difficulties came thickly ; in the mere oppression of her conscious purpose, in the keener vision at moments of Roger's distress, in a vague dread of the great unknown into which she was rushing. But she could do no other,—no other ; with this refrain she lulled her doubts. It was strange how, as the night elapsed and her heart-beats seemed to keep time to the crashing swing of the train, her pity for Roger increased. It would have been an immense relief to be able to hate him. Her un-

diminished affection, forced back upon her heart, swelled and rankled there tormentingly. But if she was unable to hate Roger, she could at least abuse herself. Every circumstance of the last six years, in this new light, seemed to have taken on a vivid meaning,—a meaning that made a sort of crime of her own want of foreknowledge. She kept thinking of expiation and determined she would write to Miss Murray, her former schoolmistress, and beg that she might come and teach little girls their scales. She kept her cousin's letter clinched in her hand ; but even when she was not thinking of Roger she was not always thinking of Fenton. She could tell Hubert Lawrence now that she was as poor and friendless as he had ever wished he could see her.

Toward morning she fell asleep for weariness. She was roused by a great tumult and the stopping of the train, which had arrived. She found with dismay that, as it was but seven o'clock, she had two or three hours on her hands. George would hardly be at his place of business before ten, and the interval seemed formidable. The dusk of a winter's morning lingered still, and increased her trouble. But she followed her companions and stood in the street. Half-a-dozen hackmen attacked her ; a facetious gentleman, lighting a cigar, asked her if she wouldn't take a carriage with him.

She made her **escape** from the bustle and hurried along the street, praying to be unnoticed. She told herself sternly that now her difficulties had begun and must be bravely faced ; but as she stood at the street-corner, beneath an unextinguished lamp, listening to the nascent hum of the town, she felt a most unreasoned sinking of the heart. A Dutch grocer, behind her, was beginning to open his shop ; an ash-barrel stood beside her, and while she lingered an old woman with a filthy bag on her back came



and poked in it with a stick ; a policeman, muffled in a comforter, came lounging squarely along the pavement and took her slender measure with his hard official eye. What a hideous, sordid world ! She was afraid to do anything but walk and walk. Fortunately, in New York, in the upper region, it is impossible to lose one's way ; and she knew that by keeping downward and to the right she should reach her appointed refuge. The streets looked shabby and of ill-repute ; the houses seemed mean and sinister. When, to fill her time, she stopped before the window of some small shop, the objects within seemed, in their ugliness, to mock at her unnatural refinement. She must give that up. At last she began to feel faint and hungry, for she had fasted since the previous morning. She ventured into an establishment which had *Ladies' Café* inscribed in gilt letters on a blue tablet in the window, and justified its title by an exhibition of stale pies and fly-blown festoons of tissue-paper. On her request, humbly preferred, for a cup of tea, she was served staringly and condescendingly by a half-dressed young woman, with frowzy hair and tumid eyes. The tea was bad, yet Nora swallowed it, not to complicate the situation. The young woman had come and sat down at her table, handled her travelling-bag, and asked a number of plain questions ; among others, if she wouldn't like to go up and lie down. " I guess it's a dollar," said this person, to conclude her achievements, alluding to the cup of tea. Nora came afterwards to a square, in which was an enclosure containing trees, a frozen fountain, thawing fast, and benches. She went in and sat down on one of the benches. Several of the others were occupied by shabby men, sullen with fasting, with their hands thrust deep into their pockets, swinging their feet for warmth. She felt a faint fellowship in their grim idleness ; but the fact that they were all men and she

the only woman, seemed to open out deeper depths in her loneliness. At last, when it was nine o'clock, she made her way to Tenth Avenue and to George's address. It was a neighbourhood of store-houses and lumber-yards, of wholesale traffic in articles she had never heard of, and of multitudinous carts, drawn up along the pavement. She found a large cheap-looking sign in black and white,—*Franks and Fenton*. Beneath it was an alley, and at the end of this alley a small office which seemed to communicate with an extension of the precinct in the rear. The office was open ; a small ragged boy was sweeping it with a broom. From him she learned that neither Franks nor Fenton had arrived, but that if she wanted, she might come in and wait. She sat down in a corner, tremulous with conjecture, and scanned the room, trying to bridge over this dull interval with some palpable memento of her cousin. But the desk, the stove, the iron safe, the chairs, the sordid ink-spotted walls, were as blank and impersonal as so many columns of figures. When at last the door opened and a man appeared, it was not Fenton, but, presumably, Franks. Mr. Franks was a small meagre man, with a whitish colouring, weak blue eyes and thin yellow whiskers, suffering apparently from some nervous malady. He nodded, he stumbled, he jerked his arms and legs about with pitiful comicality. He had a huge protuberant forehead, such a forehead as would have done honour to a Goethe or a Newton ; but poor Mr. Franks must have been at best a man of latent genius. Superficially he was a very witless person. He informed Nora, on learning her errand, that his partner (" pardner," he called it) was gone to Williamsburg on business, and would not return till noon ; meanwhile, was it anything *he* could do ? Nora's heart sank at this vision of comfort still deferred ; but she thanked Mr. Franks, and begged

leave to sit in her corner and wait. Her presence seemed to redouble his agitation; she remained for an hour gazing in painful fascination at his unnatural shrugs and spasms, as he busied himself at his desk. The Muse of accounts, for poor Mr. Franks, was, in fact, not habitually a young woman, thrice beautiful with trouble, sitting so sensibly at his elbow. Nora wondered how George had come to choose so foolish an associate; then she guessed that it was his want of capital that had discovered a secret affinity with Mr. Franks's want of brains. The merciless intensity of thought begotten by her excitement suggested that there was something dishonourable in this connexion. From time to time Mr. Franks wheeled about in his chair and fixed her solemnly with his pallid glance, as if to offer her the privilege of telling him her story; and on her failure to avail herself of it, turned back to his ledger with a little grunt of injury and a renewal of his grotesque agitation. As the morning wore away, various gentlemen of the kind designated as "parties" came in and demanded Fenton, in a tone that made the smallest possible account of Mr. Franks. Several of them sat awhile on tilted chairs, chewing their toothpicks, stroking their beards, and listening with a half-bored grin to what appeared to be an intensely confidential exposition of Mr. Franks's wrongs. One of them, as he departed, gave Nora a wink, as if to imply that the state of affairs between the two members of the firm was so broad a joke that even a pretty young woman might enjoy it. At last, when they had been alone again for half an hour, Mr. Franks closed with a slap the great leathern flanks of his account-book, and sat a moment burying his head in his arms. Then he suddenly rose and stood before the young girl. "Mr. Fenton's your cousin, Miss, you say, eh? Well, then, let me tell you that your cousin's a swindler! I can prove it

to you on those books! Nice books they are! Where is my money, thirty thousand dollars that I put into this d——d humbug of a business? What is there to show for it? I have been made a fool of,—as if I wasn't fool enough already." The tears stood in his eyes, he stamped with the bitterness of his spite; and then, thrusting his hat on his head and giving Nora's amazement no time to reply, he darted out of the door and went up the alley. Nora saw him from the window, looking up and down the street. Suddenly, while he stood and while she looked, George came up. Mr. Franks's fury seemed suddenly to evaporate; he received his companion's hand-shake and nodded toward the office, as if to tell of Nora's being there; while, to her surprise, George hereupon, without looking toward the window, turned back into the street. In a few minutes, however, he reappeared alone, and in another moment he stood before her. "Well!" he cried; "here you are, then!"

"George," she said, "I have taken you at your word."

"My word? O yes!" cried George, bravely.

She saw that he was changed, and not for the better. He looked older, he was better dressed and more prosperous; but as Nora looked at him, she felt that she had asked too much of her imagination. He eyed her from head to foot, and in a moment he had noted her simple dress and her pale face. "What on earth has happened?" he asked, closing the door with a kick.

Nora hesitated, feeling that, with words, tears might come.

"You are sick," he said, "or you are going to be sick."

This horrible idea helped her to recall her self-control. "I have left Mr. Lawrence," she said.

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"So I see!" said George, wavering between relish and disapproval. When, a few moments before, his partner had told him that a young lady was in the office, calling herself his cousin, he had straightway placed himself on his guard. The case was delicate; so that, instead of immediately advancing, he had retreated behind a green baize door twenty yards off, had "taken something," and briskly meditated. She had taken him at his word; he knew that before she told him. But confound his word if it came to this! It had been meant, not as an invitation to put herself under his care, but as a kind of speculative "feeler." Fenton, however, had a native sympathy with positive measures; and he felt, moreover, the instinct to angle in Nora's troubled waters. "What's the matter now?" he asked. "Have you quarrelled?"

"Don't call it a quarrel, George! He is as kind, he is kinder than ever," Nora cried. "But what do you think? He has asked me to marry him."

"Eh, my dear, I told you he would."

"I didn't believe you. I ought to have believed you. But it is not only that. It is that, years ago, he adopted me with that view. He brought me up for that purpose. He has done everything for me on that condition. I was to pay my debt and be his wife. I never dreamed of it. And now at last that I have grown up and he makes his claim, I can't, I can't!"

"You can't, eh? So you have left him!"

"Of course I have left him. It was the only thing to do. It was give and take. I cannot give what he wants, and I cannot give back what I have received. But I can refuse to take more."

Fenton sat on the edge of his desk, swinging his leg. He folded his arms and whistled a lively air, looking at Nora with a brightened eye. "I see, I see," he said.

Telling her tale had deepened her colour and added

to her beauty. "So here I am," she went on. "I know that I am dreadfully alone, that I am homeless and helpless. But it's a heaven to living as I have lived. I have been content all these days, because I thought I could content him. But we never understood each other. He has given me immeasurable happiness ; I know that ; and he knows that I know it ; don't you think he knows, George ?" she cried, eager even in her reserve. "I would have made him a sister, a friend. But I don't expect you to understand all this. It's enough that I am satisfied. I am satisfied," the poor girl repeated vehemently. "I have no illusions about it now ; you can trust me, George. I mean to earn my own living. I can teach ; I am a good musician ; I want above all things to work. I shall look for some employment without delay. All this time I might have been writing to Miss Murray. But I was sick with impatience to see you. To come to you was the only thing I could do ; but I shall not trouble you for long."

Fenton seemed to have but half caught the meaning of this impassioned statement, for simple admiration of her exquisite purity of purpose was fast getting the better of his caution. He gave his knee a loud slap. "Nora," he said, "you're a wonderful young lady !"

For a moment she was silent and thoughtful. "For mercy's sake," she cried at last, "say nothing to make me feel that I have done this thing too easily, too proudly and recklessly ! Really, I am anything but brave. I am full of doubts and fears."

"You're uncommonly handsome ; that's one sure thing !" said Fenton. "I would rather marry you than lose you. Poor Mr. Lawrence !" Nora turned away in silence and walked to the window, which grew to her eyes, for the moment, as the "glimmering square" of the poet. "I thought you loved him so !" he added abruptly. Nora turned back with

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an effort and a blush. "If he were to come to you now," he went on, "and go down on his knees and beg and plead and rave and all that sort of thing, would you still refuse him?"

She covered her face with her hands. "O George, George!" she cried.

"He will follow you, of course. He will not let you go so easily."

"Possibly; but I have begged him solemnly to let me take my way. Roger is not one to rave and rage. At all events, I shall refuse to see him now. A year hence I will think of it. His great desire will be, of course, that I don't suffer. I shall not suffer."

"By Jove, not if I can help it!" cried Fenton, with warmth. Nora answered with a faint, grave smile, and stood looking at him in appealing silence. He coloured beneath her glance with the pressure of his thoughts. They resolved themselves chiefly into the recurring question, "What can be made of it?" While he was awaiting inspiration, he took refuge in a somewhat inexpensive piece of gallantry. "By the way, you must be hungry."

"No, I am not hungry," said Nora, "but I am tired. You must find me a lodging,—in some quiet hotel."

"O, you shall be quiet enough," he answered; but he insisted that unless, meanwhile, she took some dinner, he should have her ill on his hands. They quitted the office, and he hailed a hack, which drove them over to the upper Broadway region, where they were soon established in a well-appointed restaurant. They made, however, no very hearty meal. Nora's hunger of the morning had passed away in fever, and Fenton himself was, as he would have expressed it, off his feed. Nora's head had begun to ache; she had removed her bonnet, and sat facing him at their small table, leaning wearily against the wall,

her plate neglected, her arms folded, her bright expanded eyes consulting the uncertain future. He noted narrowly how much prettier she was; but more even than by her prettiness he was struck by her high spirit. This belonged to an order of things in which *he* felt no commission to dabble; but in a creature of another sort he was free to admire such a luxury of conscience. In man or woman the capacity then and there to *act* was the thing he most relished. Nora had not faltered and wavered; she had chosen, and here she sat. It was an irritation to him to feel that he was not the manner of man for whom such a girl would burn her slips; for, as he looked askance at her beautiful absent eyes, he more than suspected that there was a positive as well as a negative side to her refusal of her friend. Poor Roger had a happier counterpart. It was love, and not indifference, that had pulled the wires of her adventure. Fenton, as we have intimated, was one who, when it suited him, could ride rough-shod to his mark. "You have told me *half* your story," he said, "but your eyes tell *the rest*. You'll not be Roger's wife, but you'll not die an old maid."

Nora blushed, but she answered simply, "Please don't say that."

"My dear girl," he said, "I religiously respect your secrets." But, in truth, he only half respected them. Stirred as he was by her beauty and by that sense of feminine appealingness which may be an inspiring motive even to a very shabby fellow, he was keenly mortified by feeling that her tenderness passed him by, barely touching him with the hem of its garment. She was doing mighty fine things, but she was using him, her hard, vulgar cousin, as a senseless stepping-stone. These reflexions quickened his appreciation of her charm, but took the edge from his delicacy. As they rose to go, Nora, who in spite of her absent



eyes had watched him well, felt that cousinship had melted to a mere name. George had been to her maturer vision a painful disappointment. His face, from the moment of their meeting, had given her warning to withdraw her trust. Was it she or he who had changed since that fervid youthful parting of sixteen months before? She, in the interval, had been refined by life; he had been vulgarised. She had seen the world; she had known better things and better men; she had known Hubert, and, more than ever, she had known Roger. But as she drew on her gloves she reflected with horror that distress was making her fastidious. She wished to be coarse and careless; she wished that she might have eaten a heavy dinner, that she might enjoy taking George's arm. And the slower flowed the current of her confidence, the softer dropped her words. "Now, dear George," she said, with a desperate attempt at a cheerful smile, "let me know where you mean to take me."

"Upon my soul, Nora," he said, with a hard grin, "I feel as if I had a jewel I must lay in soft cotton. The thing is to find it soft enough." George himself, perhaps, she might endure; but she had a growing horror of his friends. Among them, probably, were the female correlatives of the "parties" who had come to chat with Mr. Franks. She prayed he might not treat her to company. "You see I want to do the pretty thing," he went on. "I want to treat you, by Jove, as I would treat a queen! I can't thrust you all alone into an hotel, and I can't put up at one with you,—can I?"

"I am not in a position to be fastidious," said Nora. "I shall not object to going alone."

"No, no!" he cried, with a flourish of his hand. "I will do for you what I would do for my own sister. I am not a fine gentleman, but I know what's proper."

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I live in the house of a lady who lets out rooms,—a very nice little woman ; she and I are great cronies ; I'm sure you'll like her. She will give you the comforts of a home, and all that sort of thing."

Nora's heart sank, but she assented. They re-entered their carriage, and a drive of moderate length brought them to a brownstone dwelling of the third order of gentility, as one may say, stationed in a cheap and serried row. In a few moments, in a small tawdry front parlour, Nora was introduced to George's hostess, the nice little woman, Mrs. Paul by name. Nice enough she seemed, for Nora's comfort. She was young and fair, plump and comely ; she wore a great many ringlets. She was a trifle too loving on short acquaintance, perhaps ; but, after all, thought Nora, who was she now, to complain of that ? When the two women had gone upstairs, Fenton put on his hat,—he could never meditate without it (he had written that last letter to Nora with his beaver resting on the bridge of his nose),—and paced slowly up and down the narrow entry, chewing the end of a cigar, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the ground. In ten minutes Mrs. Paul reappeared. " Well, sir," she cried, " what does all this mean ? "

" It means money, if you'll not scream so loud," he answered. " Come in here." They went into the parlour and remained there for a couple of hours with closed doors. At last Fenton came forth and left the house. He walked along the street, humming gently to himself. Dusk had fallen ; he stopped beneath a lighted lamp at the corner, looked up and down a moment, and then exhaled a deep, an almost melancholy sigh. Having thus relieved his conscience, he proceeded to business. He consulted his watch ; it was five o'clock. An empty hack rolled by ; he called it and got in, breathing the motto of great spirits, " Confound the expense ! " His business led

him to visit successively several of the best hotels. Roger, he argued, starting immediately in pursuit of Nora, would have taken the first train from Boston, and would now have been more than an hour in town. Fenton could, of course, proceed only by probabilities ; but according to these, Roger was to be found at one of the establishments I have mentioned. Fenton knew his New York, and, from what he knew of Roger, he believed him to be at the "quietest" of these. Here, in fact, he found his name freshly registered. He would give him time, however ; he would take time himself. He stretched his long legs awhile on one of the divans in the hall. At last Roger appeared, strolling gloomily down the corridor, with his eyes on the ground. For a moment Fenton scarcely recognised him. He was pale and grave ; distress had already made him haggard. Fenton observed that, as he passed, people stared at him. He walked slowly to the street door ; whereupon Fenton, fearing he might lose him, followed him, and stood for a moment behind him. Roger turned suddenly, as if from an instinct of the other's nearness, and the two faced each other. Those dumb eyes of Roger's for once were eloquent. They glowed like living coals.

## X

THE good lady who enjoyed the sinecure of being mother-in-law to Mrs. Keith passed on that especial Sunday an exceptionally dull evening. Her son's widow was oppressed and preoccupied, and took an early leave. Mrs. Keith's first question on reaching home was as to whether Nora had left her room. On learning that she had quitted the house alone, after dark, Mrs. Keith made her way, stirred by vague conjecture, to the empty chamber, where, of course, she speedily laid her hands on those two testamentary notes to which allusion has been made. In a moment she had read the one addressed to herself. Perturbed as she was, she yet could not repress an impulse of intelligent applause. "Ah, how character plays the cards!" she mused. "How a good girl's very errors set her off!" If Roger longed for Nora to-day, who could measure the morrow's longing? He might enjoy, however, without waiting for the morrow, this refinement of desire. In spite of the late hour, Mrs. Keith repaired to his abode, armed with the other letter, deeming this, at such a moment, a more gracious course than to send for him. The letter Roger found to be brief but pregnant. "Dear Roger," it ran, "I learned this afternoon the secret of all these years,—too late for our happiness. I have been strangely blind; you have been too forbearing, —generous where you should have been strictly just.

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I never dreamed of what this day would bring. Now, I must leave you ; I can do nothing else. This is no time to thank you for what you have been to me, but I shall live to do so yet. Dear Roger, get married, and send me your children to teach. I shall live by teaching. I have a family, you know ; I go to New York to-night. I write this on my knees, imploring you to be happy. One of these days, when I have learned to be myself again, we shall be better friends than ever. I beg you, I beg you, not to follow me."

Mrs. Keith sat a long time with her host. For the first time in her knowledge of him she saw Roger violent,—violent with horror and self-censure and vain imprecation. "Take her at her word," she said ; "don't follow her. Let her knock against the world a little, and she will have you yet."

This philosophy seemed to Roger too stoical by half ; to sit at home and let Nora knock against the world was more than he could undertake. "Whether she will have me or not," he said, "I must bring her back. I am morally responsible for her. Good God ! think of her afloat in that horrible city with that rascal of a half-cousin—her 'family' she calls him !—for a pilot !" He took, of course, the first train to New York. How to proceed, where to look, was a hard question ; but to linger and waver was agony. He was haunted, as he went, with dreadful visions of what might have befallen her ; it seemed to him that he had never loved her before.

Fenton, as he recognised him, was a comfortable sight, in spite of his detested identity. He was better than uncertainty. "You have news for me !" Roger cried. "Where is she ?"

Fenton looked about him at his leisure, feeling, agreeably, that now *he* held the cards. "Gently," he said. "Hadn't we better retire ?" Upon which Roger, grasping his arm with grim devotion, led him

to his own apartment. "I rather hit it," George went on. "I am not the fool you once tried to make me seem."

"Where is she,—tell me that!" Roger repeated.

"Allow me, dear sir," said Fenton, settling himself in spacious vantage. "If I have come here to oblige you, you must let me take my own way. You don't suppose I have rushed to meet you for the pleasure of the thing. I owe it to my cousin, in the first place, to say that I have come without her knowledge."

"If you mean only to torture me," Roger answered, "say so outright. Is she well? is she safe?"

"Safe? the safest creature in the city, sir! A delightful home, maternal care!"

Roger wondered whether Fenton was making horrible sport of his trouble; he turned cold at the thought of maternal care of his providing. But he admonished himself to lose nothing by arrogance. "I thank you extremely for your kindness. Nothing remains but that I should see her."

"Nothing, indeed! You are very considerate. You know that she particularly objects to seeing you."

"Possibly! But that is for her to say. I claim the right to take the refusal from her own lips."

Fenton looked at him with an impudent parody of compassion. "Don't you think you have had refusals enough? You must enjoy them!"

Roger turned away with an imprecation, but he continued to swallow his impatience. "Mr. Fenton," he said, "you have not come here, I know, to waste words, nor have I to waste temper. You see before you a desperate man. Come, make the most of me! I am willing, I am delighted, to be fleeced! You will help me, but not for nothing. Name your terms."

Fenton flinched, but he did not protest; he only gave himself the luxury of swaggering a little. "Well, you see," he answered, "my assistance is worth

something. Let me explain how much. You will never guess! I know your story; Nora has told me everything,—everything! We have had a great talk. Let me give you a little hint of my story,—and excuse egotism! You proposed to her; she refused you. You offered her money, luxury, a position. She knew you, she liked you enormously, yet she refused you flat! Now reflect on this."

There was something revolting to Roger in seeing his adversary profaning these sacred mysteries; he protested. "I *have* reflected, quite enough. You can tell me nothing. Her affections," he added stiffly, to make an end of it, "were pre-engaged."

"Exactly! You see how that complicates matters. Poor, dear little Nora!" And Fenton gave a twist to his moustache. "Imagine, if you can, how a man placed as I am feels toward a woman,—toward *the* woman! If he reciprocates, it's love, it's passion, it's what you will, but it's common enough! But when he doesn't repay her in kind, when he can't, poor devil, it's—it's—upon my word," cried Fenton, slapping his knee, "it's chivalry!"

For some moments Roger failed to appreciate the remarkable purport of these observations; then, suddenly, it dawned upon him. "Do I understand you," he asked, in a voice gentle by force of wonder, "that *you* are the man?"

Fenton squared himself in his chair. "You have hit it, sir. I am the man,—the happy, the unhappy man. D——n it, sir, it's not my fault!"

Roger stood staring; Fenton felt his eyes penetrating him to the core. "Excuse me," said Roger, at last, "if I suggest your giving me some slight evidence in support of this extraordinary claim!"

"Evidence? isn't there about evidence enough? When a young girl gives up home and friends and fortune and—and reputation, and rushes out into the

world to throw herself into a man's arms, it seems to me you have got your evidence. But if you'll not take my word, you may leave it! I may look at the matter once too often, let me tell you! I admire Nora with all my heart; I worship the ground she treads on; but I confess I'm afraid of her; she's too good for me; she was meant for a finer gentleman than I! By which I don't mean *you*, of necessity. But you have been good to her, and you have a claim. It has been cancelled in a measure; but you wish to set it up again. Now you see that I stand in your way; that if I had a mind to, I might stand there for ever! Hang it, sir, I am playing the part of a saint. I have but a word to say to settle my case, and to settle yours. But I have my eye on a lady neither so young nor so pretty as my cousin, yet whom I can marry with a better conscience, for she expects no more than I can give her. Nevertheless, I don't answer for myself. A man isn't a saint every day in the week. Talk about conscience when a beautiful girl sits gazing at you through a mist of tears! O, you have yourself to thank for it all! A year and a half ago, if you hadn't treated me like a swindler, Nora would have been content to treat me like a friend. But women have a fancy for an outlaw. You turned me out of doors, and Nora's heart went with me. It has followed me ever since. Here I sit with my ugly face and hold it in my hand. As I say, I don't quite know what to do with it. You propose an arrangement, I inquire your terms. A man loved is a man listened to. If I were to say to Nora to-morrow, 'My dear girl, you have made a mistake. You are in a false position. Go back to Mr. Lawrence directly, and then we will talk about it!' she would look at me a moment with those beautiful eyes of hers, she would sigh, she would gather herself up like a princess on trial for treason,



remanded to prison,—and she would march to your door. Once she's within it, it's your own affair. That's what I can do. Now what can you do? Come, something handsome!"

Fenton spoke loud and fast, as if to outstrip self-contempt. Roger listened amazedly to this tissue of falsity, impudence, and greed, and at last, as Fenton paused, and he seemed to see Nora's very image turning away with a shudder, his disgust broke forth. "Upon my word, sir," he cried, "you go too far; you ask too much. Nora in love with you,—you, who haven't the grace even to lie decently! Tell me she's ill, she's lost, she's dead; but don't tell me she can look at you without horror!"

Fenton rose and stood for a moment, glaring with anger at his useless self-exposure. For an instant, Roger expected a tussle. But Fenton deemed that he could deal harder vengeance than by his fists. "Very good!" he cried. "You have chosen. I don't mind your words; you're an ass at best, and of course you are twenty times an ass when you are put out by a disagreeable truth. But you are not such a fool, I guess, as not to repent!" And Fenton made a rather braver exit than you might have expected.

Roger's recent vigil with Mrs. Keith had been dismal enough; but he was yet to learn that a sleepless night may contain deeper possibilities of suffering. He had flung back Fenton's words, but they returned to the charge. When once the gate is opened to self-torture, the whole army of fiends files in. Before morning he had fairly out-Fentoned Fenton. There was no discretion in his own love; why should there be in Nora's? We love as we must, not as we should; and she, poor girl, might have bowed to the common law. In the morning he slept awhile for weariness, but he awoke to a world of agitation. If Fenton's tale was true, and if, at Mrs. Keith's instigation, his

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own suspicions had done Hubert wrong, he would go to Hubert, pour out his woes, and demand aid and comfort. He must move to find rest. Hubert's lodging was far up town; Roger started on foot. The weather was perfect; one of those happy days of February which seem to snatch a mood from May,—a day when any sorrow is twice a sorrow. The winter was melting and trickling; you heard on all sides, in the still sunshine, the raising of windows; on the edges of opposing house-tops rested a vault of vernal blue. Where was she hidden, in the vast bright city? The streets and crowds and houses that concealed her seemed hideous. He would have beggared himself for the sound of her voice, though her words might damn him. When at last he reached Hubert's dwelling, a sudden sense of all that he risked checked his steps. Hubert, after all, and Hubert alone, was a possible rival, and it would be sad work to put the torch into his hands! So he turned heavily back to the Fifth Avenue and kept his way to the Park. Here for some time he walked about, heeding, feeling, seeing nothing but the glaring, mocking brightness of the day. At last he sat down on a bench; the delicious mildness of the air almost sickened him. It was some time before he perceived through the mist of his thoughts that two ladies had descended from a carriage hard by, and were approaching his bench,—the only one near at hand. One of these ladies was of great age and evidently infirm; she came slowly, leaning on her companion's arm; she wore a green shade over her eyes. The younger lady, who was in the prime of youth and beauty, supported her friend with peculiar tenderness. As Roger rose to give them place, he dimly observed on the young lady's face a movement of recognition, a smile,—the smile of Miss Sands! Blushing slightly, she frankly greeted him. He met her with the best

grace at his command, and felt her eyes, as he spoke, scanning the trouble in his aspect. "There is no need of my introducing you to my aunt," she said. "She has lost her hearing, and her only pleasure is to bask in the sun." She turned and helped this venerable invalid to settle herself on the bench, put a shawl about her, and satisfied her feeble needs with filial solicitude. At the end of ten minutes of commonplace talk, relieved however by certain intelligent glances on either side, Roger found a kind of healing quality in the presence of this agreeable woman. At last these sympathetic eye-beams resolved themselves, on Miss Sands's part, into speech. "You are either very unwell, Mr. Lawrence, or very unhappy."

Roger hesitated an instant, under the empire of that stubborn aversion to complaint which, in his character, was half modesty and half philosophy. But Miss Sands seemed to sit there eyeing him so like the genius of friendship, that he answered simply, "I am unhappy!"

"I was afraid it would come!" said Miss Sands. "It seemed to me when we met, a year ago, that your spirits were too high for this life. You know you told me something which gives me the right,—I was going to say, to be interested; let me say, at least, to be compassionate."

"I hardly remember what I told you. I only know that I admired you to a degree which may very well have loosened my tongue."

"O, it was about the charms of another you spoke! You told me about the young girl to whom you had devoted yourself."

"I was dreaming then; now I am awake!" Roger hung his head and poked the ground with his stick. Suddenly he looked up, and she saw that his eyes were filled with tears. "Dear lady," he said, "you

have stirred deep waters ! Don't question me. I am ridiculous with disappointment and sorrow ! ”

She gently laid her hand upon his arm. “ Let me hear it all ! I assure you I can't go away and leave you sitting here the same image of suicidal despair I found you.”

Thus urged, Roger told his story. Her attention made him understand it better himself, and, as he talked, he worked off the superficial disorder of his grief. When he came to speak of this dismal contingency of Nora's love for her cousin, he threw himself frankly upon Miss Sands's pity, upon her wisdom. “ Is such a thing possible ? ” he asked. “ Do you believe it ? ”

She raised her eyebrows. “ You must remember that I know neither Miss Lambert nor the gentleman you speak of. I can hardly risk a judgement ; I can only say this, that the general effect of your story is to diminish my esteem for women,—to elevate my opinion of men.”

“ O, except Nora on one side, and Fenton on the other ! Nora is an angel ! ”

Miss Sands gave a vexed smile. “ Possibly ! You are a man, and you ought to have loved a woman. Angels have a good conscience guaranteed them ; they may do what they please. If I should except any one, it would be Mr. Hubert Lawrence. I met him the other evening.”

“ You think it is Hubert, then ? ” Roger demanded mournfully.

Miss Sands broke into a brilliant laugh. “ For an angel, Miss Lambert hasn't lost her time on earth ! But don't ask me for advice, Mr. Lawrence ; at least not now and here. Come and see me to-morrow, or this evening. Don't regret having spoken ; you may believe at least that the burden of your grief is shared. It was too miserable that at such a time you should

be sitting here alone, feeding upon your own heart."

These seemed to Roger excellent words ; they lost nothing on the speaker's lips. She was indeed extremely beautiful ; her face, softened by intelligent pity, was lighted by a gleam of tender irony of his patience. Was he, after all, stupidly patient, ignobly fond ? There was in Miss Sands something delightfully rich and mellow. Nora, for an instant, seemed a flighty school-girl. He looked about him, vaguely questioning the empty air, longing for rest, yet dreading forfeiture. He left his place and strolled across the dull-coloured turf. At the base of a tree, on its little bed of sparse raw verdure, he suddenly spied the first violet of the year. He stooped and picked it ; its mild firm tint was the colour of friendship. He brought it back to Miss Sands, who now had risen with her companion and was preparing to return to the carriage. He silently offered her the violet,—a mere pin's head of bloom ; a passionate throb of his heart had told him that this was all he could offer her. She took it with a sober smile ; it seemed to grow pale beneath her dark blue eyes. " We shall see you again ? " she said.

Roger felt himself blushing to his brows. He had a vision on either hand of an offered cup,—the deep-hued wine of illusion,—the bitter draught of constancy. A certain passionate instinct answered,—an instinct deeper than his wisdom, his reason, his virtue,—deep as his love. " Not now," he said. " A year hence ! "

Miss Sands turned away and stood for a moment as motionless as some sculptured statue of renunciation. Then, passing her arm caressingly round her companion, " Come, dear aunt," she murmured ; " we must go." This little address to the stone-deaf dame was her single tribute to confusion. Roger walked with the ladies to their carriage and silently helped

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them to enter it. He noted the affectionate tact with which Miss Sands adjusted her movements to those of her companion. When he lifted his hat, his friend bowed, as he fancied, with an air of redoubled compassion. She had but imagined his prior loss,—she knew his present one! “She would make an excellent wife!” he said, as the carriage rolled away. He stood watching it for some minutes; then, as it wheeled round a turn, he was seized with a deeper, sorer sense of his impotent idleness. He would go to Hubert with his accusation, if not with his appeal.

## XI

NORA, relieved of her hostess's company, turned the key in her door and went through certain motions mechanically suggestive of her being at rest and satisfied. She unpacked her little bag and repaired her disordered toilet. She took out her inkstand and prepared to write a letter to Miss Murray. But she had not written many words before she lapsed into sombre thought. Now that she had seen George again and judged him, she was coming rapidly to feel that to have exchanged Roger's care for his care was, for the time, to have paid a scanty compliment to Roger. But she took refuge from this reflexion in her letter, and begged for an immediate reply. From time to time, as she wrote, she heard a step in the house, which she supposed to be George's; it somehow quickened her pen and the ardour of her petition. This was just finished when Mrs. Paul reappeared, bearing a salver charged with tea and toast,—a gracious attention, which Nora was unable to repudiate. The lady took advantage of it to open a conversation. Mrs. Paul's overtures, as well as her tea and toast, were the result of her close conference with Fenton; but though his instructions had made a very pretty show as he laid them down, they dwindled sensibly in the vivid glare of Nora's mistrust. Mrs. Paul, nevertheless, seated herself bravely on the bed and

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rubbed her plump pretty hands like the best little woman in the world. But the more Nora looked at her, the less she liked her. At the end of five minutes she had conceived a horror of her comely stony face, her false smile, her little tulle cap, her artificial ringlets. Mrs. Paul called her my dear, and tried to take her hand ; Nora was afraid that, the next thing, she would kiss her. With a defiant flourish, Nora addressed her letter with Miss Murray's venerated title ; " I should like to have this posted, please," she said.

" Give it to me, my dear ; I will attend to it," said Mrs. Paul ; and straightway read the address. " I suppose this is your old schoolmistress. Mr. Fenton told me all about it." Then, after turning the letter for a moment, " Keep it over a day ! "

" Not an hour," said Nora, with decision. " My time is precious."

" Why, my dear," said Mrs. Paul, " we shall be delighted to keep you a month."

" You are very good. You know I have my living to make."

" Don't talk about that ! I make *my* living,—I know what it means ! Come, let me talk to you as a friend. Don't go too far. Suppose, now, you take it all back ? Six months hence, it may be too late. If you leave him lamenting too long, he'll marry the first pretty girl he sees. They always do,—a man refused is just like a widower. They're not so faithful as the widows ! But let me tell you it's not every girl that gets such a chance ; I would have snapped at it. He'll love you the better, you see, for your having led him a little dance. But he mustn't dance too long ! Excuse the liberty I take ; but Mr. Fenton and I, you see, are great friends, and I feel as if his cousin was my cousin. Take back this letter and give me just one word to post,—*Come !* Poor little



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man ! You must have a high opinion of men, my dear, to play such a game with this one ! ”

If Roger had wished for a proof that Nora still cared for him, he would have found it in the disgust she felt at hearing Mrs. Paul undertake his case. The young girl coloured with her sense of the defilement of sacred things. George, surely, for an hour, at least, might have kept her story intact. “ Really, madam,” she answered, “ I can’t discuss this matter. I am extremely obliged to you.” But Mrs. Paul was not to be so easily baffled. Poor Roger, roaming helpless and hopeless, would have been amazed to hear how warmly his cause was being urged. Nora, of course, made no attempt to argue the case. She waited till the lady had exhausted her eloquence, and then, “ I am a very obstinate person,” she said ; “ you waste your words. If you go any further I shall take offence.” And she rose, to signify that Mrs. Paul might do likewise. Mrs. Paul took the hint, but in an instant she had turned about the hard reverse of her fair face, in which defeated self-interest smirked horribly. “ Bah ! you’re a silly girl ! ” she cried, and swept out of the room. Nora, after this, determined to avoid a second interview with George. Her bad headache furnished a sufficient pretext for escaping it. Half an hour later he knocked at her door ; quite too loudly, she thought, for good taste. When she opened it, he stood there, excited, angry, ill-disposed. “ I am sorry you are ill,” he said ; “ but a night’s rest will put you right. I have seen Roger.”

“ Roger ! is he here ? ”

“ Yes, he’s here. But he don’t know where you are. Thank the Lord you left him ! he’s a brute ! ” Nora would fain have learned more,—whether he was angry, whether he was suffering, whether he had asked to see her ; but at these words she shut the door in her cousin’s face. She hardly dared think of

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what offered impertinence this outbreak of Fenton's was the rebound. Her night's rest brought little comfort. She wondered whether Roger had supposed George to be her appointed mediator, and asked herself whether it was not her duty to see him once again and bid him a respectfully personal farewell. It was a long time after she rose before she could bring herself to leave her room. She had a vague hope that if she delayed, her companions might have gone out. But in the dining-room, in spite of the late hour, she found George gallantly awaiting her. He had apparently had the discretion to dismiss Mrs. Paul to the background, and apologised for her absence by saying that she had breakfasted long since and had left the house. He seemed to have slept off his wrath and was full of brotherly *bonhomie*. "I suppose you will want to know about Roger," he said, when they were seated at breakfast. "He had followed you directly, in spite of your hope that he wouldn't ; but it was not to beg you to come back. He counts on your repentance, and he expects you to break down and come to him on your knees, to beg his pardon and promise never to do it again. Pretty terms to marry a man on, for a woman of spirit ! But he doesn't know his woman, does he, Nora ? Do you know what he intimated ? indeed, he came right out with it. That you and I want to make a match ! That you're in love with me, Miss, and ran away to marry me. That we expected him to forgive us and endow us with a pile of money. But he'll not forgive us,—not he ! We may starve, we and our brats, before he looks at us. Much obliged ! We shall thrive, for many a year, as brother and sister, sha'n't we, Nora, and need neither his money nor his pardon ? "

In reply to this speech, Nora sat staring in pale amazement. "Roger thought," she at last found

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words to say, "that it was to marry *you* I refused him,—to marry *you* I came to New York?"

Fenton, with seven-and-twenty years of impudence at his back, had received in his day snubs and shocks of various shades of intensity; but he had never felt in his face so chilling a blast of reprobation as this cold disgust of Nora's. We know that the scorn of a lovely woman makes cowards brave; it may do something towards making knaves honest men. "Upon my word, my dear," he cried, "I am sorry I hurt your feelings. It may be offensive, but it is true."

Nora wished in after years she had been able to laugh at this disclosure; to pretend, at least, to an exhilaration she so little felt. But she remained almost sternly silent, with her eyes on her plate, stirring her tea. Roger, meanwhile, was walking about under this detestable deception. Let him think anything but that! "What did you reply," she asked, "to this—to this——"

"To this handsome compliment? I replied that I only wished it were true; but that I feared I had no such luck! Upon which he told me to go to the Devil,—in a tone which implied that he didn't much care if you went with me."

Nora listened to this speech in freezing silence. "Where is Roger?" she asked at last.

Fenton shot her a glance of harsh mistrust. "Where is he? What do you want to know that for?"

"Where is he, please?" she simply repeated. And then, suddenly, she wondered how and where it was the two men had happened to meet. "Where did you find him?" she went on. "How did it happen?"

Fenton drained his cup of tea at one long gulp before he answered. "My dear Nora," he said, "it's all very well to be modest, it's all very well to be proud; but take care you are not ungrateful! I went purposely to look him up. I was convinced he would have

followed you to beg and implore you, as I supposed, to come back. I wanted to say to him, 'She's safe, she's happy, she's in the best hands. Don't waste your time, your words, your hopes. Give her rope. Go quietly home and leave things to me. If she gets homesick, I will let you know.' You see I'm frank, Nora; that's what I meant to say. But I was received with this broadside. I found a perfect bluster of injured vanity. 'You're her lover, she's your mistress, and be d——d to both of you!'"

That George deliberately lied Nora did not distinctly say to herself, for she lacked practice in this range of incrimination. But she as little said to herself that this could be the truth. "I am not ungrateful," she answered firmly. "But where was it?"

At this, George pushed back his chair. "Where—where? Don't you believe me? Do you want to go and ask him if it's true? What is the matter with you, anyway? What are you up to? Have you put yourself into my hands, or not?" A certain manly indignation was now kindled in his breast; he was equally angry with Roger, with Nora, and with himself; fate had offered him an overdose of contumely, and he felt a reckless, savage impulse to wring from the occasion that compliment to his power which had been so rudely denied to his delicacy. "Are you using me simply as a vulgar tool? Don't you care for me the least little bit? Let me suggest that for a girl in your—your ambiguous position, you are several shades too proud. Don't go back to Roger in a hurry! You are not the immaculate young person you were but two short days ago. Who am I, what am I, to the people whose opinion you care for? A very low fellow, my dear; and yet, in the eyes of the world, you have certainly taken up with me. If you are not prepared to do more, you should have done less. Nora, Nora," he went on, breaking

into a vein none the less revolting for being more ardent, " I confess I don't understand you ! But the more you puzzle me the more you fascinate me ; and the less you like me the more I love you. What has there been, anyway, between you and Lawrence ? Hang me if I can understand ! Are you an angel of purity, or are you the most audacious of flirts ? "

She had risen before he had gone far. " Spare me," she said, " the necessity of hearing your opinions or answering your questions. Please be a gentleman ! Tell me, I once more beg of you, where Roger is to be found ? "

" Be a gentleman ! " was a galling touch. He placed himself before the door. " I refuse the information," he said. " I don't mean to have been played with, to have been buffeted hither by Roger and thither by you ! I mean to make something out of all this. I mean to request you to remain quietly in this room. Mrs. Paul will keep you company. You didn't treat her over well, yesterday ; but, in her way, she is quite as strong as you. Meanwhile I shall go to our friend. ' She's locked up tight,' I will say ; ' she's as good as in jail. Give me five thousand dollars and I'll let her out.' Of course he will begin to talk about legal proceedings. Then I will tell him that he is welcome to take legal proceedings if he doesn't mind the exposure. The exposure won't be pleasant for you, Nora, you know ; for the public takes things in the lump. It won't hurt me ! "

" Heaven forgive you ! " murmured Nora, for all response to this explosion. It made a hideous whirl about her ; but she felt that to advance in the face of it was her best safety. It sickened rather than frightened her. She went to the door. " Let me pass ! " she said.

Fenton stood motionless, leaning his head against

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the door, with his eyes closed. She faced him a moment, looking at him intently. He seemed ineffably repulsive. "Coward!" she cried. He opened his eyes at the sound; for an instant they met hers; then a burning blush blazed out strangely on his dead complexion; he strode past her, dropped into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. "O Lord!" he cried. "I am an ass!"

Nora made it the work of a single moment to reach her own room and fling on her bonnet and shawl, of another to descend to the hall door. Once in the street she never stopped running till she had turned a corner and put the house out of sight. She went far, hurried along by the ecstasy of relief and escape, and it was some time before she perceived that this was but half the question, and that she was now quite without refuge. Thrusting her hand into her pocket to feel for her purse, she found that she had left it in her room. Stunned and sickened as she was already, it can hardly be said that the discovery added to her grief. She was being precipitated toward a great decision; sooner or later made little difference. The thought of seeing Hubert Lawrence had now taken possession of her. Reserve, prudence, mistrust, had melted away; she was mindful only of her trouble, of his nearness, and of the way he had once talked to her. His address she well remembered, and she neither paused nor faltered. To say even that she reflected would be to speak amiss, for her longing and her haste were one. Between them both it was with a beating heart that she reached his door. The servant admitted her without visible surprise (for Nora wore, as she conceived, the air of some needy parishioner) and ushered her into his bachelor's parlour. As she crossed the threshold, she perceived with something both of regret and of relief that he was not alone. He was sitting somewhat stiffly, with

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folded arms, facing the window, near which, before an easel, stood a long-haired gentleman of foreign and artistic aspect, giving the finishing touches to a portrait in crayons. Hubert was in position for a likeness of his handsome face. When Nora appeared, his handsome face remained for a moment a blank ; the next it turned most eloquently pale. "Miss Lambert !" he cried.

There was such a tremor in his voice that Nora felt that, for the moment, she must have self-possession for both. "I interrupt you," she said with extreme deference.

"We are just finishing !" Hubert answered. "It is my portrait, you see. You must look at it." The artist made way for her before the easel, laid down his implements, and took off his hat and gloves. She looked mechanically at the picture, while Hubert accompanied her to the door, and they talked awhile about another sitting, and about a frame that was to be sent home. The portrait was clever, but superficial ; better looking, at once, and worse looking than Hubert,—elegant, effeminate, unreal. An impulse of wonder passed through her mind that she should happen just then to find him engaged in this odd self-reproduction. It was a different Hubert that turned and faced her as the door closed behind his companion, the real, the familiar Hubert. He had gained time ; but surprise, admiration, conjecture, a lively suggestion of dismay, were shining in his handsome eyes. Nora had dropped into the chair vacated by the artist ; and as she sat there with clasped hands, she felt the young man reading the riddle of her shabby dress and her excited face. For him, too, she was the real Nora. Dismay in Hubert's face began to elbow its companions. He advanced, pushed towards her the chair in which he had been posturing, and, as he seated himself, made a half-movement to

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offer his hand ; but before she could take it, he had begun to play with his watch-chain. " Nora," he asked, " what is it ? "

What was it, indeed ? What was her errand, and in what words could it be told ? An inexpressible weakness had taken possession of her, a sense of having reached the goal of her journey, the term of her strength. She dropped her eyes on her shabby skirt and passed her hand over it with a gesture of eloquent simplicity. " I have left Roger," she said.

Hubert made no answer, but his silence seemed to fill the room. He sank back in his chair, still looking at her with startled eyes. The fact intimidated him ; he was amazed and confused ; yet he felt he must say something, and in his confusion he uttered a gross absurdity. " Ah," he said, " with his consent ? "

The sound of his voice was so grateful to her that, at first, she hardly heeded his words. " I am alone," she added, " I am free." It was after she had spoken, as she saw him, growing, to his own sense, infinitely small in the large confidence of her gaze, rise in a kind of agony of indecision and stand before her, stupidly staring, that she felt he had neither taken her hand, nor dropped at her feet, nor divinely guessed her trouble ; that, in fact, his very silence was a summons to tell her story and justify herself. Her presence there was either a rapture or a shame. Nora felt as if she had taken a jump, and was learning in mid-air that the distance was tenfold what she had imagined. It is strange how the hinging-point of great emotions may rest on an instant of time. These instants, however, seem as ages, viewed from within ; and in such a reverberating moment Nora felt something that she had believed to be a passion melting from beneath her feet, crumbling and crashing into the gulf on whose edge she stood. But her shame at least should be brief. She rose and bridged this dizzy chasm



with some tragic counterfeit of a smile. "I have come—I have come——" She began and faltered. It was a pity some great actress had not been there to note upon the tablets of her art the light, all-eloquent tremor of tone with which she transposed her embarrassment into the petition, "Could you lend me a little money?"

Hubert was simply afraid of her. All his falsity, all his levity, all his egotism and sophism, seemed to crowd upon him and accuse him in deafening chorus; he seemed exposed and dishonoured. It was with an immense sense of relief that he heard her ask this simple favour. Money? Would money buy his release? He took out his purse and grasped a roll of bills; then suddenly he was overwhelmed by a sense of his cruelty. He flung the thing on the floor, and passed his hands over his face. "Nora, Nora," he cried, "say it outright; you despise me!"

He had become, in the brief space of a moment, the man she once had loved; but if he was no longer the rose, he stood too near it to be wantonly bruised. Men and women alike need in some degree to respect those they have suffered to wrong them. She stooped and picked up the *portemonnaie*, like a beggar-maid in a ballad. "A very little will do," she said. "In a day or two I hope to be independent."

"Tell me at least what has happened!" he cried.

She hesitated a moment. "Roger has asked me to be his wife." Hubert's head swam with the vision of all that this simple statement embodied and implied. "I refused," Nora added, "and, having refused, I was unwilling to live any longer on his—on his——" Her speech at the last word melted into silence, and she seemed to fall a-musing. But in an instant she recovered herself. "I remember your once saying that you would have liked to see me poor and home-

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less. Here I am! You ought at least," she added with a laugh, "to pay for the exhibition!"

Hubert abruptly drew out his watch. "I expect here at any moment," he said, "a young lady of whom you may have heard. She is to come and see my portrait. I am engaged to marry her. I was engaged to marry her five months ago. She is rich, pretty, charming. Say but a single word, that you don't despise me, that you forgive me, and I will give her up, now, here, for ever, and be anything you will take me for,—your husband, your friend, your slave!" To have been able to make this speech gave Hubert immense relief. He felt almost himself again.

Nora fixed her eyes on him, with a kind of unfathomable gentleness. "You are engaged, you *were* engaged? How strangely you talk about giving her up! Give her my compliments!" It seemed, however, that Nora was to have the chance of offering her compliments personally. The door was thrown open and admitted two ladies whom Nora vaguely remembered to have seen. In a moment she recognised them as the persons whom, on the evening she had gone to hear Hubert preach, he had left her, after the sermon, to conduct to their carriage. The younger one was decidedly pretty, in spite of a nose a trifle too aquiline. A pair of imperious dark eyes, as bright as the diamond which glittered in each of her ears, and a nervous, capricious rapidity of motion and gesture, gave her an air of girlish *brusquerie* which was by no means without charm. Her mother's aspect, however, testified to its being as well to enjoy this charm at a distance. She was a stout, coarse-featured, good-natured woman, with a jaded, submissive expression, and seemed to proclaim by a certain ponderous docility, as she followed in her daughter's wake, the subserviency of matter to mind.

Both ladies were dressed to the uttermost limit of opportunity. They came into the room staring frankly at Nora, and overlooking Hubert, with a gracious implication of his being already one of the family. The situation was a trying one, but he faced it as he might.

"This is Miss Lambert," he said gravely; and then with an effort to dissipate embarrassment by a jest, waving his hand toward his portrait, "This is the Reverend Hubert Lawrence!"

The elder lady moved toward the picture, but the other came straight to Nora. "I have seen you before!" she cried defiantly, and with defiance in her pretty eyes. "And I have heard of you too! Yes, you are certainly very handsome. But pray, what are you doing here?"

"My dear child!" said Hubert imploringly, and with a burning side-glance at Nora. The world seemed to him certainly very cruel.

"My dear Hubert," said the young lady, "what is she doing here? I have a right to know. Have you come running after him even here? You are a wicked girl. You have done me a wrong. You have tried to turn him away from me. You kept him in Boston for weeks, when he ought to have been here; when I was writing to him day after day to come. I heard all about it! I don't know what is the matter with you. I thought you were so very well off! You look very poor and unhappy, but I must say what I think!"

"My own darling, be reasonable!" murmured her mother. "Come and look at this beautiful picture. There's no deceit in that noble face!"

Nora smiled charitably. "Don't attack me," she said. "If I ever wronged you, I was quite unconscious of it, and I beg your pardon now."

"Nora," murmured Hubert piteously, "spare me!"

"Ah, does he call you Nora?" cried the young

lady. "The harm's done, madam! He will never be what he was. You have changed, Hubert!" And she turned passionately upon her intended. "You know you have! You talk to me, but you think of her. And what is the meaning of this visit? You are both strangely excited; what have you been talking about?"

"Mr. Lawrence has been telling me about you," said Nora; "how pretty, how charming, how gentle you are!"

"I am not gentle!" cried the other. "You are laughing at me! Was it to talk about my prettiness you came here? Do you go about alone, this way? I never heard of such a thing. You are shameless! do you know that? But I am very glad of it; because once you have done this for him, he will not care for you. That's the way with men. And I am not pretty either, not as you are! You are pale and tired; you have got a horrid dress and shawl, and yet you are beautiful! Is that the way I must look to please you she demanded, turning back to Hubert.

Hubert, during this rancorous tirade, had stood looking as dark as thunder, and at this point he broke out fiercely, "Good God, Amy! hold your tongue,—I command you."

Nora, gathering her shawl together, gave Hubert a glance. "She loves you," she said softly.

Amy stared a moment at this vehement adjuration; then she melted into a smile and turned in ecstasy to her mother. "O, did you hear that?" she cried. "That's how I like him. Please say it again!"

Nora left the room; and, in spite of her gesture of earnest deprecation, Hubert followed her downstairs to the street. "Where are you going?" he asked in a whisper. "With whom are you staying?"

"I am alone," said Nora.

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"Alone in this great city? Nora, I *will* do something for you."

"Hubert," she said, "I never in my life needed help less than at this moment. Farewell." He fancied for an instant that she was going to offer him her hand, but she only motioned him to open the door. He did so, and she passed out.

She stood there on the pavement, strangely, almost absurdly, free and light of spirit. She knew neither whither she should turn nor what she should do, yet the fears which had haunted her for a whole day and night had vanished. The sky was blazing blue overhead; the opposite side of the street was all in sun; she hailed the joyous brightness of the day with a kind of answering joy. She seemed to be in the secret of the universe. A nursery-maid came along, pushing a baby in a perambulator. She stooped and greeted the child, and talked pretty nonsense to it with a fervour which left the young woman staring. Nurse and child went their way, and Nora lingered, looking up and down the empty street. Suddenly a gentleman turned into it from the cross-street above. He was walking fast; he had his hat in his hand, and with his other hand he was passing his handkerchief over his forehead. As she stood and watched him draw near, down the bright vista of the street, there came upon her a singular and altogether nameless sensation, strangely similar to the one she had felt a couple of years before, when a physician had given her a dose of ether. The gentleman, she perceived, was Roger; but the short interval of space and time which separated them seemed to expand into a throbbing immensity and eternity. She seemed to be watching him for an age, and, as she did so, to be floating through the whole circle of emotion and the full realisation of being. Yes, she was in the secret of the universe, and the secret of the universe was,

that Roger was the only man in it who had a heart. Suddenly she felt a palpable grasp. Roger stood before her, and had taken her hand. For a moment he said nothing ; but the touch of his hand spoke loud. They stood for an instant scanning the change in each other's faces. "Where are you going?" said Roger at last, imploringly.

Nora read silently in his haggard eyes the whole record of his suffering. It is a strange truth that this seemed the most beautiful thing she had ever looked upon ; the sight of it was delicious. It seemed to whisper louder and louder that secret about Roger's heart.

Nora collected herself as solemnly as one on a deathbed making a will ; but Roger was still in miserable doubt and dread. "I have followed you," he said, "in spite of that request in your letter."

"Have you got my letter?" Nora asked.

"It was the only thing you had left me," he said, and drew it forth, creased and crumpled.

She took it from him and thrust it into the pocket of her dress, never taking her eyes off his own. "Don't try and forget that I wrote it," she said. "I want you to see me burn it up, and to remember that."

"What does it mean, Nora?" he asked, in hardly audible tones.

"It means that I am a wiser girl to-day than *then*. I know myself better, I know you better. O Roger!" she cried, "it means everything!"

He passed her hand through his arm and held it there against his heart, while he stood looking hard at the pavement, as if to steady himself amid this great convulsion of things. Then raising his head, "Come," he said ; "come!"

But she detained him, laying her other hand on his arm. "No ; you must understand first. If I am wiser now, I have learnt wisdom at my cost.

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I am not the girl you proposed to on Sunday. I feel—I feel *dishonoured*!” she said, uttering the word with a vehemence that stirred his soul to its depths.

“My own poor child!” he murmured, staring.

“There is a young girl in that house,” Nora went on, “who will tell you that I am shameless!”

“What house? what young girl?”

“I don’t know her name. Hubert is engaged to marry her.”

Roger gave a glance at the house behind them, as if to fling defiance and oblivion upon all that it suggested and contained. Then turning to Nora with a smile of exquisite tenderness: “My dear Nora, what have *we* to do with Hubert’s young girls?”

Roger, the reader will admit, was on a level with the occasion,—as with every other occasion that subsequently presented itself.

Mrs. Keith and Mrs. Lawrence are very good friends. On being complimented on possessing the confidence of so charming a woman as Mrs. Lawrence, Mrs. Keith has been known to say, opening and shutting her fan, “The fact is, Nora is under a very peculiar obligation to me!”





## LONGSTAFF'S MARRIAGE



FORTY years ago that traditional and anecdotal liberty of young American women which is notoriously the envy and despair of their foreign sisters was not so firmly established as at the present hour ; yet it was sufficiently recognised to make it no scandal that so pretty a girl as Diana Belfield should start for the grand tour of Europe under no more imposing protection than that of her cousin and intimate friend, Miss Agatha Josling. She had, from the European point of view, beauty enough to make her enterprise perilous—the beauty foreshadowed in her name, which might have been given in prevision of her tall, light figure, her nobly poised head weighted with a coronal of auburn braids, her frank quick glance, and her rapid gliding step. She used often to walk about with a big dog, who had the habit of bounding at her side and tossing his head against her outstretched hand ; and she had, moreover, a trick of carrying her long parasol, always folded, for she was not afraid of the sunshine, across her shoulder, in the fashion of a soldier's musket on a march. Thus equipped, she looked wonderfully like that charming antique statue of the goddess of the chase which we encounter in various replicas in half the museums of the world. You half expected to see a sandal-shod foot peep out beneath her fluttering robe. It was with this tread of the wakeful huntress that she stepped upon the old sailing-vessel which was to bear her to foreign

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lands. Behind her, with a great many shawls and satchels, came her little kinswoman, with quite another *démarche*. Agatha Josling was not a beauty, but she was the most judicious and most devoted of companions. These two persons had been united by the death of Diana's mother, when the latter young lady took possession of her patrimony. The first use she made of her inheritance was to divide it with Agatha, who had not a penny of her own ; the next was to purchase a letter of credit upon a European banker. The cousins had contracted a classical friendship—they had determined to be all in all to each other, like the Ladies of Llangollen. Only, though their friendship was exclusive, their Llangollen was to be comprehensive. They would tread the pavements of historic cities and wander through the aisles of Gothic cathedrals, wind on tinkling mules through mountain gorges and sit among dark-eyed peasants on the shores of blue lakes. It may seem singular that a beautiful girl with a pretty fortune should have been left to seek the supreme satisfaction of life in friendship tempered by sight-seeing ; but Diana herself considered this pastime no beggarly alternative. Though she never told it herself, her biographer may do so ; she had had, in vulgar parlance, a hundred offers. To say that she had declined them is to say too little ; they had filled her with contempt. They had come from honourable and amiable men, and it was not her suitors in themselves that she contemned ; it was simply the idea of marrying. She found it insupportable ; a fact which completes her analogy with the mythic divinity to whom I have likened her. She was passionately single, fiercely virginal ; and in the straight-glancing grey eye which provoked men to admire, there was a certain silvery ray which forbade them to hope. The fabled Diana took a fancy to a beautiful shepherd,

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but the real one had not yet found, sleeping or waking, her Endymion.

Thanks to this defensive eyebeam, the dangerous side of our heroine's enterprise was slow to define itself ; thanks, too, to the exquisite propriety of her companion. Agatha Josling had an almost Quakerish purity and dignity ; a bristling dragon could not have been a better safeguard than this glossy, grey-breasted dove. Money, too, is a protection, and Diana had money enough to purchase privacy. She travelled largely, and saw all the churches and pictures, the castles and cottages, included in the list which had been drawn up by the two friends in evening talks, at home, between two wax candles. In the evening they used to read aloud to each other from *Corinne* and *Childe Harold*, and they kept a diary in common, at which they "collaborated," like French playwrights, and which was studded with quotations from the authors I have mentioned. This lasted a year, at the end of which they found themselves a trifle weary. A snug posting-carriage was a delightful habitation, but looking at miles of pictures was very fatiguing to the back. Buying souvenirs and trinkets under foreign arcades was a most absorbing occupation ; but inns were dreadfully apt to be draughty, and bottles of hot water, for application to the feet, had a disagreeable way of growing lukewarm. For these and other reasons our heroines determined to take a winter's rest, and for this purpose they betook themselves to the charming town of Nice, which was then but in the infancy of its fame. It was simply one of the hundred hamlets of the Riviera—a place where the blue waves broke on an almost empty strand and the olive-trees sprouted at the doors of the inns. In those days Nice was Italian, and the "Promenade des Anglais" existed only in an embryonic form. Exist, however, it did, practically,

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and British invalids, in moderate numbers, might have been seen taking the January sunshine beneath London umbrellas before the many-twinkling sea. Our young Americans quietly took their place in this harmless society. They drove along the coast, through the strange, dark, huddled fishing-villages, and they rode on donkeys among the bosky hills. They painted in water-colours and hired a piano; they subscribed to the circulating library, and took lessons in the language of Silvio Pellico from an old lady with very fine eyes, who wore an enormous brooch of cracked malachite, and gave herself out as the widow of a Roman exile.

They used to go and sit by the sea, each provided with a volume from the circulating library; but they never did much with their books. The sunshine made the page too dazzling, and the people who strolled up and down before them were more entertaining than the ladies and gentlemen in the novels. They looked at them constantly from under their umbrellas; they learned to know them all by sight. Many of their fellow-visitors were invalids—mild, slow-moving consumptives. But for the fact that women enjoy the exercise of pity, I should have said that these pale promenaders were a saddening spectacle. In several of them, however, our friends took a personal interest; they watched them from day to day; they noticed their changing colour; they had their ideas about who was getting better and who was getting worse. They did little, however, in the way of making acquaintances—partly because pulmonary sufferers are no great talkers, and partly because this was also Diana's disposition. She said to her friend that they had not come to Europe to pay morning-calls; they had left their best bonnets and card-cases behind them. At the bottom of her reserve was the apprehension that she should be

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"admired"; which was not fatuity, but simply an induction from an embarrassing experience. She had seen in Europe, for the first time, certain horrid men—polished adventurers with offensive looks and mercenary thoughts; and she had a wholesome fear that one of these gentlemen might approach her through some accidental breach in her reserve. Agatha Josling, who had neither in reminiscence nor in prospect the same reasons for turning her graceful back, would have been glad to extend the circle of their acquaintance, and would even have consented to put on her best bonnet for the purpose. But she had to content herself with an occasional murmur of small-talk, on a bench before the sea, with two or three English ladies of the botanising class; jovial little spinsters who wore stout boots, gauntlets, and "uglies," and in pursuit of wayside flowers scrambled into places where the first-mentioned articles were uncompromisingly visible. For the rest, Agatha contented herself with spinning suppositions about the people she never spoke to. She framed a great deal of hypothetic gossip, invented theories and explanations—generally of the most charitable quality. Her companion took no part in these harmless devisings, except to listen to them with an indolent smile. She seldom honoured her fellow-mortals with finding apologies for them, and if they wished her to read their history they must write it out in the largest letters.

There was one person at Nice upon whose biography, if it had been laid before her in this fashion, she probably would have bestowed a certain amount of attention. Agatha had noticed the gentleman first; or Agatha, at least, had first spoken of him. He was young and he looked interesting; Agatha had indulged in a good deal of wondering as to whether or no he belonged to the invalid category.

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She preferred to believe that one of his lungs was "affected"; it certainly made him more interesting. He used to stroll about by himself and sit for a long time in the sun, with a book peeping out of his pocket. This book he never opened; he was always staring at the sea. I say always, but my phrase demands an immediate modification; he looked at the sea whenever he was not looking at Diana Belfield. He was tall and fair, slight, and, as Agatha Josling said, aristocratic-looking. He dressed with a certain careless elegance which Agatha deemed picturesque; she declared one day that he reminded her of a love-sick prince. She learned eventually from one of the botanising spinsters that he was not a prince, that he was simply an English gentleman, Mr. Reginald Longstaff. There remained the possibility that he was love-sick; but this point could not be so easily settled. Agatha's informant had assured her, however, that if they were not princes, the Longstaffs, who came from a part of the country in which she had visited, and owned great estates there, had a pedigree which many princes might envy. It was one of the oldest and the best of English names; they were one of the innumerable untitled country families who held their heads as high as the highest. This poor Mr. Longstaff was a beautiful specimen of a young English gentleman; he looked so gentle, yet so brave; so modest, yet so cultivated! The ladies spoke of him habitually as "poor" Mr. Longstaff, for they now took for granted that there was something the matter with him. At last Agatha Josling discovered what it was and made a solemn proclamation of the same. The matter with poor Mr. Longstaff was simply that he was in love with Diana! It was certainly natural to suppose he was in love with some one, and, as Agatha said, it could not possibly be with herself. Mr. Longstaff was pale and



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slightly dishevelled ; he never spoke to any one ; he was evidently preoccupied, and his mild, candid face was a sufficient proof that the weight on his heart was not a bad conscience. What could it be, then, but an unrequited passion ? It was, however, equally pertinent to inquire why Mr. Longstaff took no steps to bring about a requital.

" Why in the world does he not ask to be introduced to you ? " Agatha Josling demanded of her companion.

Diana replied, quite without eagerness, that it was plainly because he had nothing to say to her ; and she declared, with a trifle more emphasis, that she was incapable of proposing to him a topic of conversation. She added that she thought they had gossiped enough about the poor man, and that if by any chance he should have the bad taste to speak to them, she would certainly go away and leave him alone with Miss Josling. It is true, however, that at an earlier period she had let fall the remark that he was quite the most " distinguished " person at Nice ; and afterwards, though she was never the first to allude to him, she had more than once let her companion pursue the theme for some time without reminding her of its futility. The one person to whom Mr. Longstaff was observed to speak was an elderly man of foreign aspect who approached him occasionally in the most deferential manner, and whom Agatha Josling supposed to be his servant. This individual was apparently an Italian ; he had an obsequious attitude, a pair of grizzled whiskers, an insinuating smile. He seemed to come to Mr. Longstaff for orders ; presently he went away to execute them, and Agatha noticed that on retiring he always managed to pass in front of her companion, on whom he fixed his respectful but penetrating gaze. " He knows the secret," she always said, with gentle

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jocoseness ; " he knows what is the matter with his master and he wants to see whether he approves of you. Old servants never want their masters to marry, and I think this worthy man is rather afraid of you. At any rate, the way he stares at you tells the whole story."

" Every one stares at me ! " said Diana wearily. " A cat may look at a king."

As the weeks went by, Agatha Josling quite made up her mind that Mr. Longstaff's complaint was pulmonary. The poor young man's invalid character was now quite apparent ; he could hardly hold up his head or drag one foot after the other ; his servant was always near him to give him an arm or to hand him an extra overcoat. No one indeed knew with certainty that he was consumptive ; but Agatha agreed with the lady who had given the information about his pedigree, that this fact was in itself extremely suspicious ; for, as the little Englishwoman forcibly remarked, unless he were ill, why should he make such a mystery of it ? Consumption declaring itself in a young man of family and fortune was particularly sad ; such people often had diplomatic reasons for pretending to enjoy excellent health. It kept the legacy-hunters and the hungry next-of-kin from worrying them to death. Agatha observed that this poor gentleman's last hours seemed likely to be only too lonely. She felt very much like offering to nurse him ; for, being no relation, he could not accuse her of mercenary motives. From time to time he got up from the bench where he habitually sat, and strolled slowly past the two friends. Every time that he came near them Agatha had a singular feeling—a conviction that now he was really going to speak to them. He would speak with the gravest courtesy—she could not fancy him speaking otherwise. He began, at a distance, by fixing his grave, soft eyes on

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Diana, and as he advanced you would have said that he was coming straight up to her with some tremulous compliment. But as he drew nearer, his intentness seemed to falter ; he strolled more slowly, he looked away at the sea, and he passed in front of her without having the courage to let his eyes rest upon her. Then he passed back again in the same fashion, sank down upon his bench, fatigued apparently by his aimless stroll, and fell into a melancholy reverie. To enumerate these accidents is to attribute to his behaviour a certain aggressiveness which it was far from possessing ; there was something scrupulous and subdued in his manner which made it perfectly discreet, and it may be affirmed that not a single idler on the sunny shore suspected his speechless "attentions."

"I wonder why it doesn't annoy us more that he should look at us so much," said Agatha Josling one day.

"That who should look at us?" asked Diana, not at all affectedly.

Agatha fixed her eyes for a moment on her friend, and then said gently—

"Mr. Longstaff. Now, don't say, 'Who is Mr. Longstaff?' " she added.

"I have yet to learn, really," said Diana, "that the person you appear to mean does look at us. I have never caught him in the act."

"That is because whenever you turn your eyes towards him he looks away. He is afraid to meet them. But I see him."

These words were exchanged one day as the two friends sat as usual before the twinkling sea ; and, beyond them, as usual, lounged Reginald Longstaff. Diana bent her head faintly forward and glanced towards him. He was looking full at her and their eyes met, apparently for the first time. Diana dropped

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her own upon her book again, and then, after a silence of some moments, "It does annoy me," she said. Presently she added that she would go home and write a letter, and, though she had never taken a step in Europe without having Agatha by her side, Miss Josling now allowed her to depart unattended. "You won't mind going alone?" Agatha had asked. "It is but three minutes, you know."

Diana replied that she preferred to go alone, and she moved away, with her parasol over her shoulder.

Agatha Josling had a particular reason for this variation from their maidenly custom. She felt a sudden conviction that if she were left alone, Mr. Longstaff would come and speak to her and say something very important, and she accommodated herself to this conviction without the sense of doing anything immodest. There was something solemn about it; it was a sort of presentiment; but it did not frighten her; it only made her feel very kind and appreciative. It is true that when at the end of ten minutes (they had seemed rather long) she saw the young man rise from his seat and slowly come towards her, she was conscious of a certain trepidation. Mr. Longstaff drew near; at last, he was close to her; he stopped and stood looking at her. She had averted her head, so as not to appear to expect him; but now she looked round again, and he very gravely lifted his hat.

"May I take the liberty of sitting down?" he asked.

Agatha bowed in silence, and, to make room for him, moved a certain blue shawl of Diana's which was lying on the bench. He slowly sank into the place and then said very gently—

"I have ventured to speak to you, because I have something particular to say." His voice trembled and he was extremely pale. His eyes, which Agatha thought very handsome, had a remarkable expression.

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"I am afraid you are ill," she said, with great kindness. "I have often noticed you and pitied you."

"I thought you did, a little," the young man answered. "That is why I made up my mind to speak to you."

"You are getting worse," said Agatha softly.

"Yes, I am getting worse; I am dying. I am perfectly conscious of it; I have no illusions. I am weaker every day; I shall last but a few weeks." This was said very simply; sadly, but not lugubriously.

But Agatha felt almost awe-stricken; there stirred in her heart a delicate sense of sisterhood with this beautiful young man who sat there and talked so submissively of death.

"Can nothing be done?" she said.

He shook his head and smiled a little. "Nothing but to try and get what pleasure I can from this little remnant of life."

Though he smiled she felt that he was very serious; that he was, indeed, deeply agitated, and trying to master his emotion.

"I am afraid you get very little pleasure," Agatha rejoined. "You seem entirely alone."

"I am entirely alone. I have no family—no near relations. I am absolutely alone."

Agatha rested her eyes on him compassionately, and then—

"You ought to have spoken to us," she said.

He sat looking at her; he had taken off his hat; he was slowly passing his hand over his forehead. "You see I do—at last!"

"You wanted to before?"

"Very often."

"I thought so!" said Agatha, with a candour which was in itself a dignity.

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"But I couldn't," said Mr. Longstaff. "I never saw you alone."

Before she knew it Agatha was blushing a little ; for, to the ear, simply, his words implied that it was to her only he would have addressed himself for the pleasure he had coveted. But the next instant she had become conscious that what he meant was simply that he admired her companion so much that he was afraid of her, and that, daring to speak to herself, he thought her a much less formidable and less interesting personage. Her blush immediately faded ; for there was no resentment to keep the colour in her cheek ; and there was no resentment still when she perceived that, though her neighbour was looking straight at her, with his inspired, expanded eyes, he was thinking too much of Diana to have noticed this little play of confusion.

"Yes, it's very true," she said. "It is the first time my friend has left me."

"She is very beautiful," said Mr. Longstaff.

"Very beautiful—and as good as she is beautiful."

"Yes, yes," he rejoined, solemnly. "I am sure of that. I *know* it !"

"I know it even better than you," said Agatha, smiling a little.

"Then you will have all the more patience with what I want to say to you. It is very strange ; it will make you think, at first, that I am perhaps out of my mind. But I am not ; I am thoroughly reasonable. You will see." Then he paused a moment ; his voice had begun to tremble again.

"I know what you are going to say," said Agatha, very gently. "You are in love with my friend."

Mr. Longstaff gave her a look of devoted gratitude ; he lifted up the edge of the blue shawl, which he had often seen Diana wear, and pressed it to his lips.

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"I am extremely grateful!" he exclaimed. "You don't think me crazy, then?"

"If you are crazy, there have been a great many madmen!" said Agatha.

"Of course there have been a great many. I have said that to myself, and it has helped me. They have gained nothing but the pleasure of their love, and I therefore, in gaining nothing and having nothing, am not worse off than the rest. But they had more than I, hadn't they? You see I have had absolutely nothing—not even a glance," he went on. "I have never even seen her look at me. I have not only never spoken to her, but I have never been near enough to speak to her. This is all I have ever had—to lay my hand on something she has worn; and yet for the past month I have thought of her night and day. Sitting over there, a hundred rods away, simply because she was sitting in this place, in the same sunshine, looking out on the same sea: that was happiness enough for me. I am dying, but for the last five weeks that has kept me alive. It was for that I got up every day and came out here; but for that, I should have stayed at home and never have got up again. I have never sought to be presented to her, because I didn't wish to trouble her for nothing. It seemed to me it would be an impertinence to tell her of my admiration. I have nothing to offer her—I am but the shadow of a living man, and if I were to say to her, 'Madam, I love you,' she could only answer, 'Well, sir, what then?' Nothing—nothing! To speak to her of what I felt seemed only to open the lid of a grave in her face. It was more delicate not to do that; so I kept my distance and said nothing. Even this, as I say, has been a happiness, but it has been a happiness that has tired me out. This is the last of it. I must give up and make an

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end!" And he stopped, panting a little, and apparently exhausted with his eloquence.

Agatha had always heard of love at first sight; she had read of it in poems and romances, but she had never been so near to it as this. It seemed to her wonderfully beautiful, and she believed in it devoutly. It made Mr. Longstaff brilliantly interesting; it cast a glory over the details of his face and person and the pleading inflexions of his voice. The little English ladies had been right; he was certainly a perfect gentleman. She could trust him.

"Perhaps if you stay at home a while you will get better," she said, soothingly.

Her tone seemed to him such an indication that she accepted the propriety and naturalness of his passion that he put out his hand, and for an instant laid it on her own.

"I knew you were reasonable—I knew I could talk to you. But I shall not get well. All the great doctors say so, and I believe them. If the passionate desire to get well for a particular purpose could work a miracle and cure a mortal disease, I should have seen the miracle two months ago. To get well and have a right to speak to your friend—that was my passionate desire. But I am worse than ever; I am very weak, and I shall not be able to come out any more. It seemed to me to-day that I should never see you again, and yet I wanted so much to be able to tell you this! It made me very unhappy. What a wonderful chance it is that she went away! I must be grateful; if Heaven doesn't grant my great prayers it grants my small ones. I beg you to render me this service. Tell her what I have told you. Not now—not till I am gone. Don't trouble her with it while I am in life. Please promise me that. But when I am dead it will seem less importunate, because then you can speak of me in the past. It will be ~~the~~



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a story. My servant will come and tell you. Then please say to her—' You were his last thought, and it was his last wish that you should know it.' " He slowly got up and put out his hand ; his servant, who had been standing at a distance, came forward with obsequious solemnity, as if it were part of his duty to adapt his deportment to the tone of his master's conversation. Agatha Josling took the young man's hand, and he stood and looked at her a moment longer. She too had risen to her feet ; she was much impressed.

" You won't tell her until *after*——? " he said pleadingly. She shook her head. " And then you will tell her, faithfully ? " She nodded, he pressed her hand, and then, having raised his hat, he took his servant's arm, and slowly moved away.

Agatha kept her word ; she said nothing to Diana about her interview. The young Americans came out and sat upon the shore the next day, and the next, and the next, and Agatha watched intently for Mr. Longstaff's reappearance. But she watched in vain ; day after day he was absent, and his absence confirmed his sad prediction. She thought all this a wonderful thing to happen to a woman, and as she glanced askance at her beautiful companion, she was almost irritated at seeing her sit there so careless and serene, while a poor young man was dying, as one might say, of love for her. At moments she wondered whether, in spite of her promise, it were not her Christian duty to tell Diana his story, and give her the chance to go to him. But it occurred to Agatha, who knew very well that her companion had a certain stately pride in which she herself was deficient, that even if she were told of his condition Diana might decline to do anything ; and this she felt to be a very painful thing to see. Besides, she had promised, and she always kept her promises. But her

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thoughts were constantly with Mr. Longstaff and the romance of the affair. This made her melancholy, and she talked much less than usual. Suddenly she was aroused from a reverie by hearing Diana express a careless curiosity as to what had become of the solitary young man who used to sit on the neighbouring bench and do them the honour to stare at them.

For almost the first time in her life, Agatha Josling deliberately dissembled.

"He has either gone away, or he has taken to his bed. I am sure he is dying, alone, in some wretched mercenary lodging."

"I prefer to believe something more cheerful," said Diana. "I believe he is gone to Paris and is eating a beautiful dinner at a great restaurant."

Agatha for a moment said nothing; and then—

"I don't think you care what becomes of him," she ventured to observe.

"My dear child, why should I care?" Diana demanded.

And Agatha Josling was forced to admit that there really was no particular reason. But the event contradicted her. Three days afterwards she took a long drive with her friend, from which they returned only as dusk was closing in. As they descended from the carriage at the door of their lodging she observed a figure standing in the street, slightly apart, which even in the early darkness had an air of familiarity. A second glance assured her that Mr. Longstaff's servant was hovering there in the hope of catching her attention. She immediately determined to give him a liberal measure of it. Diana left the vehicle, and passed into the house, while the coachman fortunately asked for orders for the morrow. Agatha briefly gave such as were necessary, and then, before going in, turned to the hovering figure. It approached on tiptoe, hat in hand, and shaking its

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head very sadly. The old man wore an air of animated affliction which indicated that Mr. Longstaff was a generous master, and he proceeded to address Miss Josling in that macaronic French which is usually at the command of Italian domestics who have seen the world.

"I stole away from my dear gentleman's bedside on purpose to have ten words with you. The old woman at the fruit-stall opposite told me that you had gone to drive, so I waited; but it seemed to me a thousand years till you returned!"

"But you have not left your master alone?" said Agatha.

"He has two Sisters of Charity—heaven reward them! They watch with him night and day. He is very low, *pauvre cher homme!*" And the old man looked at the little lady with that clear, human, sympathetic glance with which Italians of all classes bridge over the social gulf. Agatha felt that he knew his master's secret, and that she might discuss it with him freely.

"Is he dying?" she asked.

"That's the question, dear lady! He is very low. The doctors have given him up; but the doctors don't know his malady. They have felt his dear body all over, they have sounded his lungs, and looked at his tongue and counted his pulse; they know what he eats and drinks—it's soon told! But they haven't seen his *mind*, dear lady. I have; and so far I am a better doctor than they. I know his secret—I know that he loves the beautiful girl above!" and the old man pointed to the upper windows of the house.

"Has your master taken you into his confidence?" Agatha demanded.

He hesitated a moment; then shaking his head a little and laying his hand on his heart—

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" Ah, dear lady," he said, " the point is whether I have taken him into mine. I have not, I confess ; he is too far gone. But I have determined to be his doctor and to try a remedy the others have never thought of. Will you help me ? "

" If I can," said Agatha. " What is your remedy ? "

The old man pointed to the upper windows of the house again.

" Your lovely friend ! Bring her to his bedside."

" If he is dying," said Agatha, " how would that help him ? "

" He is dying for want of it. That's my idea at least, and I think it's worth trying. If a young man loves a beautiful woman, and, having never so much as touched the tip of her glove, falls into a mortal illness and wastes away, it requires no great wit to see that his illness doesn't come from his having indulged himself too grossly. It comes rather from the opposite cause ! If he sinks when she's away, perhaps he will come up when she's there. At any rate, that's my theory ; and any theory is good that will save a dying man. Let the young lady come and stand a moment by his bed, and lay her hand upon his. We shall see what happens. If he gets well, it's worth while ; if he doesn't, there is no harm done. A young lady risks nothing in going to see a poor gentleman who lies in a stupor between two holy women."

Agatha was much impressed with this picturesque reasoning, but she answered that it was quite impossible that her beautiful friend should go upon this pious errand without a special invitation from Mr. Longstaff. Even should he beg Diana to come to him, Agatha was by no means sure her companion would go ; but it was very certain she would not take such an extraordinary step at the mere suggestion of a servant.

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"But you, dear lady, have the happiness not to be a servant," the old man rejoined. "Let the suggestion be yours."

"From me it could come with no force, for what am I supposed to know about your poor master?"

"You have not told your friend what my dear master told you the other day?"

Agatha answered this question by another question.

"Did he tell you what he had told me?"

The old man tapped his forehead an instant and smiled.

"A good servant, you know, dear lady, needs never to be told things! If you have not repeated my master's words to the signorina, I beg you very earnestly to do so. I am afraid she is rather cold."

Agatha glanced a moment at the upper windows, and then she gave a silent nod. She wondered greatly to find herself discussing Diana's character with this aged menial; but the situation was so strange and romantic that one's old landmarks of propriety were quite obliterated, and it seemed natural that an Italian *valet de chambre* should be as frank and familiar as a servant in an old-fashioned comedy.

"If it is necessary that my dear master shall send for the young lady," Mr. Longstaff's domestic resumed, "I think I can promise you that he will. Let me urge you, meanwhile, to talk to her. If she is cold, warm her up! Prepare her to find him very interesting. If you could see him, poor gentleman, lying there as still and handsome as if he were his own monument in a *campo santo*, I think he would interest you."

This seemed to Agatha a very touching image, but it occurred to her that her interview with Mr. Longstaff's representative, now unduly prolonged, was assuming a nocturnal character. She abruptly

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brought it to a close, after having assured her interlocutor that she would reflect upon what he had told her ; and she rejoined her companion in the deepest agitation. Late that evening her agitation broke out. She went into Diana's room, where she found this young lady standing white-robed before her mirror, with her auburn tresses rippling down to her knees ; and then, taking her two hands, she told the story of the young Englishman's passion, told of his coming to talk to her that day that Diana had left her alone on the bench by the sea, and of his venerable valet having, a couple of hours before, sought speech of her on the same subject. Diana listened, at first with a rosy flush, and then with a cold, an almost cruel, frown.

"Take pity upon him," said Agatha Josling—"take pity upon him and go and see him."

"I don't understand," said her companion, "and it seems to me very disagreeable. What is Mr. Longstaff to me?" But before they separated, Agatha had persuaded her to say that if a message really should come from the young man's death-bed, she would not refuse him the light of her presence.

The message really came, brought of course by the invalid's zealous chamberlain. He reappeared on the morrow, announcing that his master humbly begged for the honour of ten minutes' conversation with the two ladies. They consented to follow him, and he led the way to Mr. Longstaff's apartments. Diana still wore her irritated brow, but it made her look more than ever like the easily-startled goddess of the chase. Under the old man's guidance they passed through a low green door in a yellow wall, across a tangled garden full of orange-trees and winter roses, and into a white-wainscoted saloon, where they were presently left alone before a great classic Empire clock, perched upon a frigid southern

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chimney-place. They waited, however, but a few moments; the door of an adjoining room opened, and the Sisters of Charity, in white-winged hoods and with their hands thrust into the loose sleeves of the opposite arm, came forth and stood with downcast eyes on either side of the threshold. Then the old servant appeared between them, and beckoned to the two young girls to advance. The latter complied with a certain hesitation, and he led them into the chamber of the dying man. Here, pointing to the bed, he silently left them and withdrew; not closing, however, the door of communication of the saloon, where he took up his station with the Sisters of Charity.

Diana and her companion stood together in the middle of the darker room, waiting for an invitation to approach their summoner. He lay in his bed, propped up on pillows, with his arms outside the counterpane. For a moment he simply gazed at them; he was as white as the sheet that covered him, and he certainly looked like a dying man. But he had the strength to bend forward and to speak in a soft, distinct voice.

"Would you be so kind as to come nearer?" said Mr. Longstaff.

Agatha Josling gently pushed her friend forward, but she followed her to the bedside. Diana stood there; her frown had melted away; and the young man sank back upon his pillows and looked at her. A faint colour came into his face, and he clasped his two hands together on his breast. For some moments he simply gazed at the beautiful girl before him. It was an awkward situation for her, and Agatha expected her at any moment to turn away in disgust. But, slowly, her look of proud compulsion, of mechanical compliance, was exchanged for something more patient and pitying. The young English-

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man's face expressed a kind of spiritual ecstasy which, it was impossible not to feel, gave a peculiar sanctity to the occasion.

"It was very generous of you to come," he said at last. "I hardly ventured to hope you would. I suppose you know—I suppose your friend, who listened to me so kindly, has told you?"

"Yes, she knows," murmured Agatha—"she knows."

"I did not intend you should know until after my death," he went on; "but"—and he paused a moment and shook his clasped hands together—"I couldn't wait! And when I felt that I couldn't wait, a new idea, a new desire, came into my mind." He was silent again for an instant, still looking with worshipful entreaty at Diana. The colour in his face deepened. "It is something that you may do for me. You will think it a most extraordinary request; but, in my position, a man grows bold. Dear lady, will you marry me?"

"Oh dear!" cried Agatha Josling, just audibly. Her companion said nothing—her attitude seemed to say that in this remarkable situation one thing was no more surprising than another. But she paid Mr. Longstaff's proposal the respect of slowly seating herself in a chair which had been placed near his bed; here she rested in maidenly majesty, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

"It will help me to die happy, since die I must!" the young man continued. "It will enable me to do something for you—the only thing I can do. I have property—lands, houses, a great many beautiful things—things I have loved and am very sorry to be leaving behind me. Lying here helpless and hopeless through so many days, the thought has come to me of what a bliss it would be to know that they should rest in your hands. If you were my



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wife, they would rest there safely. You might be spared much annoyance; and it is not only that. It is a fancy I have beyond that. It would be the feeling of it! I am fond of life. I don't want to die; but since I must die, it would be a happiness to have got just this out of life—this joining of our hands before a priest. You could go away then. For you it would make no change—it would be no burden. But I should have a few hours in which to lie and think of my happiness."

There was something in the young man's tone so simple and sincere, so tender and urgent, that Agatha Josling was touched to tears. She turned away to hide them, and went on tiptoe to the window, where she silently let them flow. Diana apparently was not unmoved. She raised her eyes and let them rest kindly on those of Mr. Longstaff, who continued softly to urge his proposal. "It would be a great charity," he said, "a great condescension; and it can produce no consequence to you that you could regret. It can only give you a larger liberty. You know very little about me, but I have a feeling that, so far as belief goes, you can believe me, and that is all I ask of you. I don't ask you to love me—that takes time. It is something I can't pretend to. It is only to consent to the form, the ceremony. I have seen the English clergyman; he says he will perform it. He will tell you, besides, all about me—that I am an English gentleman, and that the name I offer you is one of the best in the world."

It was strange to hear a dying man lie there and argue his point so reasonably and consistently; but now, apparently, his argument was finished. There was a deep silence, and Agatha thought it would be discreet on her own part to retire. She moved quietly into the adjoining room, where the two Sisters of Charity still stood with their hands in their

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sleeves, and the old Italian valet was taking snuff with a melancholy gesture, like a baffled diplomatist. Agatha turned her back to these people, and, approaching a window again, stood looking out into the garden upon the orange-trees and the winter roses. It seemed to her that she had been listening to the most beautiful, most romantic, and most eloquent of declarations. How could Diana be insensible to it? She earnestly hoped her companion would consent to the solemn and interesting ceremony proposed by Mr. Longstaff, and though her delicacy had prompted her to withdraw, it permitted her to listen eagerly to what Diana should say. Then (as she heard nothing) it was eclipsed by the desire to go back and whisper, with a sympathetic kiss, a word of counsel. She glanced round again at the Sisters of Charity, who appeared to have perceived that the moment was a critical one. One of them detached herself, and, as Agatha returned, followed her a few steps into the room. Diana had got up from her chair. She was looking about her uneasily—she grasped at Agatha's hand. Reginald Longstaff lay there with his wasted face and his brilliant eyes, looking at them both. Agatha took her friend's two hands in both her own.

"It is very little to do, dearest," she murmured, "and it will make him very happy."

The young man appeared to have heard her, and he repeated her words in a tone of intense entreaty.

"It is very little to do, dearest!"

Diana looked round at him an instant. Then, for an instant, she covered her face with her two hands. Removing them, but holding them still against her cheeks, she looked at her companion with eyes that Agatha always remembered—eyes through which a thin gleam of mockery flashed from the seriousness of her face.

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"Suppose, after all, he should not die?" she murmured.

Longstaff heard it; he gave a long, soft moan, and turned away. The Sister immediately approached his bed, on the other side, dropped on her knees and bent over him, while he leaned his head against the great white cape upon which her crucifix was displayed. Diana stood a moment longer, looking at him; then, gathering her shawl together with a great dignity, she slowly walked out of the room. Agatha could do nothing but follow her. The old Italian, holding the door open for them to pass out, made them an exaggerated obeisance.

In the garden Diana paused, with a flush in her cheek, and said—

"If he could die with it, he could die without it!" But beyond the garden gate, in the empty sunny street, she suddenly burst into tears.

Agatha made no reproaches, no comments; but her companion, during the rest of the day, spoke of Mr. Longstaff several times with an almost passionate indignation. She pronounced his conduct indelicate, egotistic, impertinent; she declared that the scene had been revolting. Agatha, for the moment, remained silent, but the next day she attempted to make some vague apology for the poor young man. Then Diana, with passionate emphasis, begged her to be so good as never to mention his name again; and she added that this disgusting incident had put her completely out of humour with Nice, from which place they would immediately take their departure. This they did without delay; they began to travel again. Agatha heard no more of Reginald Longstaff; the English ladies who had been her original source of information with regard to him had now left Nice; otherwise she would have written to them for news. That is, she would have thought of writing to them;

a suspect that, on the whole, she would have denied herself this satisfaction, on the ground of loyalty to her friend. Agatha, at any rate, could only drop a tear, at solitary hours, upon the young man's unanswered prayer and early death. It must be confessed, however, that sometimes, as the weeks elapsed, a certain faint displeasure mingled itself with her sympathy—a wish that, roughly speaking, poor Mr. Longstaff had left them alone. Since that strange interview at his bedside things had not gone well; the charm of their earlier wanderings seemed broken. Agatha said to herself that, really, if she were superstitious, she might fancy that Diana's conduct on this occasion had brought them under an evil spell. It was no superstition, certainly, to think that this young lady had lost a certain generous mildness of temper. She was impatient, absent-minded, indifferent, capricious. She expressed unaccountable opinions and proposed unnatural plans. It is true that disagreeable things were constantly happening to them—things which would have taxed the most unruffled spirit. Their post-horses broke down, their postilions were impertinent, their luggage went astray, their servants betrayed them. The heavens themselves seemed to join in the conspiracy, and for days together were dark and ungenerous, treating them only to wailing winds and watery clouds. It was, in a large measure, in the light of ~~after~~ years that Agatha judged this period; but even at the time she felt it to be depressing, uncomfortable, unnatural. Diana apparently shared her opinion of it, though she never openly avowed it. She took refuge in a kind of haughty silence, and whenever a new disaster came to her knowledge, she simply greeted it with a bitter smile—a smile which Agatha always interpreted as an ironical reflexion on poor fantastic, obtrusive Mr. Longstaff, who,

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through some mysterious action upon the machinery of nature, had turned the tide of their fortunes. At the end of the summer, suddenly, Diana proposed they should go home, speaking of it in the tone of a person who gives up a hopeless struggle. Agatha assented, and the two ladies returned to America, much to the relief of Miss Josling, who had an uncomfortable sense that there was something unexpressed and unregulated between them, which gave their intercourse a resemblance to a sultry morning. But at home they separated very tenderly, for Agatha had to go into the country and devote herself to her nearer kinsfolk. These good people, after her long absence, were exacting, so that for two years she saw nothing of her late companion.

She often, however, heard from her, and Diana figured in the town-talk that was occasionally wafted to her rural home. She sometimes figured strangely—as a rattling coquette who carried on flirtations by the hundred and broke hearts by the dozen. This had not been Diana's former character, and Agatha found matter for meditation in the change. But the young lady's own letters said little of her admirers and displayed no trophies. They came very fitfully—sometimes at the rate of a dozen a month and sometimes not at all; but they were usually of a serious and abstract cast and contained the author's opinions upon life, death, religion, immortality. Mistress of her actions and of a pretty fortune, it might have been expected that news would come in trustworthy form of Diana's having at last accepted one of her rumoured lovers. Such news in fact came, and it was apparently trustworthy, inasmuch as it proceeded from the young lady herself. She wrote to Agatha that she was to be married, and Agatha immediately congratulated her upon her happiness. Then Diana wrote back that though she was to be

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married she was not at all happy ; she shortly afterwards added that she was neither happy nor to be married. She had broken off her projected union, and her felicity was smaller than ever. Poor Agatha was sorely perplexed, and she found it a comfort that a month after this her friend should have sent her a peremptory summons to come to her. She immediately obeyed.

Arriving, after a long journey, at the dwelling of her young hostess, she saw Diana at the further end of the drawing-room, with her back turned, looking out of the window. She was evidently watching for Agatha, but Miss Josling had come in, by accident, through a private entrance which was not visible from the window. She gently approached her friend and then Diana turned. She had her two hands laid upon her cheeks, and her eyes were sad ; her face and attitude suggested something that Agatha had seen before and kept the memory of. While she kissed her Agatha remembered that it was just so she had stood for that last moment before poor Mr. Longstaff.

" Will you come abroad with me again ? " Diana asked. " I am very ill."

" Dearest, what is the matter ? " said Agatha.

" I don't know ; I believe I am dying. They tell me this place is bad for me ; that I must have another climate ; that I must move about. Will you take care of me ? I shall be very easy to take care of now."

Agatha, for all answer, embraced her afresh, and as soon after this as possible the two friends embarked again for Europe. Miss Josling had thrown herself the more freely into this scheme, as her companion's appearance seemed a striking confirmation of her words. Not, indeed, that she looked as if she were dying ; but in the two years that had elapsed since

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their separation she had wasted and faded. She looked more than two years older, and the brilliancy of her beauty was dimmed. She was pale and languid, and she moved more slowly than when she seemed a goddess treading the forest leaves. The beautiful statue had grown human and taken on some of the imperfections of humanity. And yet the doctors by no means affirmed that she had a mortal malady; and when one of them was asked by an inquisitive matron why he had recommended this young lady to cross the seas, he replied with a smile that it was a principle in his system to prescribe the remedies that his patients greatly desired.

At present the fair travellers had no misadventures. The broken charm had renewed itself; the heavens smiled upon them, and their postilions treated them like princesses. Diana, too, had completely recovered her native serenity; she was the gentlest, the most docile, the most reasonable of women. She was silent and subdued, as was natural in an invalid, though in one important particular her demeanour was certainly at variance with the idea of debility. She had much more taste for motion than for rest, and constant change of place became the law of her days. She wished to see all the places that she had not seen before, and all the old ones over again.

"If I am really dying," she said, smiling softly, "I must leave my farewell cards everywhere." So she passed her days in a great open carriage, leaning back in it and looking, right and left, at everything she passed. On her former journey to Europe she had seen but little of England, and now she determined to visit the whole of this famous island. She rolled for weeks through the beautiful English landscape, past meadows and hedgerows, over the avenues of great estates and under the walls of castles and abbeys. For the English parks and manors, the

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"Halls" and "Courts," she had an especial admiration, and into the grounds of such as were open to appreciative tourists she made a point of penetrating. Here she stayed her carriage beneath the oaks and beeches, and sat for an hour at a time listening to nightingales and watching browsing deer. She never failed to visit a residence that lay on her road, and as soon as she arrived at a town she inquired punctiliously whether there were any fine country-seats in the neighbourhood. In this delightful fashion she spent a whole summer. Through the autumn she continued to wander restlessly; she visited, on the Continent, a hundred watering-places and travellers' resorts. The beginning of the winter found her in Rome, where she confessed to being very tired and prepared to seek repose.

"I am weary, weary," she said to her companion. "I didn't know how weary I was. I feel like sinking down in this City of Rest, and resting here for ever."

She took a lodging in an old palace, where her chamber was hung with ancient tapestries, and her drawing-room decorated with the arms of a pope. Here, giving way to her fatigue, she ceased to wander. The only thing she did was to go every day to St. Peter's. She went nowhere else. She sat at her window all day with a big book in her lap, which she never read, looking out into a Roman garden at a fountain **plashing** into a weedy alcove, and half-a-dozen **nymphs** in mottled marble. Sometimes she told her companion that she was happier this way than she had ever been—in this way, and in going to St. Peter's. In the great church she often spent the whole afternoon. She had a servant behind her, carrying a stool; he placed her stool against a marble pilaster, and she sat there for a long time, looking up into the airy hollow of the dome and over the vast, peopled pavement. She noticed every one who



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passed her ; but Agatha, lingering beside her, felt less at liberty, she hardly knew why, to make remarks about the people around them than she had felt when they sat upon the shore at Nice.

One day Agatha left her and strolled about the church by herself. The ecclesiastical life of Rome had not shrunken to its present smallness, and in one corner or another of St. Peter's there was always some occasion of worship. Agatha found plenty of entertainment, and was absent for half an hour. When she came back she found her companion's place deserted, and she sat down on the empty stool to await her reappearance. Some time elapsed, and then she wandered away in quest of her. She found her at last, near one of the side-altars ; but she was not alone. A gentleman stood before her whom she appeared just to have encountered. Her face was very pale, and its expression led Agatha to look straightway at the stranger. Then she saw he was no stranger ; he was Reginald Longstaff ! He too, evidently, had been much startled, but he was already recovering himself. He stood very gravely an instant longer ; then he silently bowed to the two ladies and turned away.

Agatha felt at first as if she had seen a ghost ; but the impression was immediately corrected by the fact that Mr. Longstaff's aspect was very much less ghostly than it had been in life. He looked like a strong man ; he held himself upright, and had a handsome colour. What Agatha saw in Diana's face was not surprise ; it was a pale radiance which she waited a moment to give a name to. Diana put out her hand and laid it in her arm, and her touch helped Agatha to know what it was that her face expressed. Then she felt too that this knowledge itself was not a surprise ; she seemed to have been waiting for it. She looked at her friend again, and Diana was

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beautiful. Diana blushed and became more beautiful yet. Agatha led her back to her seat near the marble pilaster.

"So you were right," Agatha said presently. "He would, after all, have got well!"

Diana would not sit down; she motioned to her servant to bring away the stool, and continued to move towards the door. She said nothing until she stood without, in the great square, between the colonnades and fountains. Then she spoke.

"I am right now, but I ~~was~~ wrong then. He got well because I refused him. I gave him a hurt that cured him."

That evening, beneath the Roman lamps in the great drawing-room of the arms of the pope, a remarkable conversation took place between the two friends. Diana wept and hid her face; but her tears and her shame were gratuitous. Agatha felt, as I have said, that she had already guessed all the unexplained, and it was needless for her companion to tell her that three weeks after she had refused Reginald Longstaff she insanely loved him. It was needless that Diana should confess that his image had never been out of her mind, that she believed he was still among the living, and that she had come back to Europe with a desperate hope of meeting him. It was in this hope that she had wandered from town to town and looked at every one who passed her; and it was in this hope that she had lingered in so many English parks. She knew her love was very strange; she could only say it had consumed her. It had all come upon her afterwards—in retrospect, in meditation. Or rather, she supposed, it had been there always, since she first saw him, and the revulsion from displeasure to pity, after she left his bedside, had brought it out. And with it came the faith that he had indeed got well, both of his malady and of his own

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passion. This was her punishment ! And then she spoke with a divine simplicity which Agatha, weeping a little too, wished that, if this belief of Diana's were true, the young man might have heard. " I am so glad he is well and strong. And that he looks so handsome and so good ! " ~~And~~ she presently added, " Of course he has got well 'only to hate me. He wishes never to see me again. Very good. I have had my wish ; I have seen him once more. That was what I wanted, and I can die content."

It seemed in fact as if she were going to die. She went no more to St. Peter's, and exposed herself to no more encounters with Mr. Longstaff. She sat at her window and looked out at the freckled dryads and the cypresses, or wandered about her quarter of the palace with a vaguely smiling resignation. Agatha watched her with a sadness that was less submissive. This too was something that she had heard of, that she had read of in poetry and fable, but that she had never supposed she should see—her companion was dying of love ! Agatha thought of many things and made up her mind upon several. The first of these latter was to send for the doctor. This personage came, and Diana let him look at her through his spectacles and hold her white wrist. He announced that she was ill, and she smiled and said she knew it ; and then he gave her a little phial of gold-coloured fluid, which he bade her to drink. He recommended her to remain in Rome, as the climate exactly suited her complaint. Agatha's second desire was to see Mr. Longstaff, who had appealed to her, she reflected, in the day ~~of~~ his own tribulation, and whom she therefore had a right to approach at present. She found it impossible to believe, too, that the passion which led him to take that extraordinary step at Nice was extinct ; such passions as that never died. If he had made no further attempt to

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see Diana, it was because he believed that she was still as cold as when she turned away from his death-bed. It must be added, moreover, that Agatha felt a lawful curiosity to learn how from that deathbed he had risen again into blooming manhood. This last point there was ~~no~~ theory to explain.

Agatha went to St. Peter's, feeling sure that sooner or later she should encounter him there. At the end of a week she perceived him, and seeing her, he immediately came and spoke to her. As Diana had said, he was now extremely handsome, and he looked particularly good. He was a quiet, blooming, gallant young English gentleman. He seemed much embarrassed, but his manner to Agatha expressed the highest consideration.

"You must think me a dreadful impostor," he said, very gravely. "But I *was* dying—or I believed I was."

"And by what miracle did you recover?"

He was silent a moment, and then he said—

"I suppose it was by the miracle of wounded pride!" She noticed that he asked nothing about Diana; and presently she felt that he knew she was thinking of this. "The strangest part of it," he added, "was, ~~that~~ when my strength came back to me, what had gone before had become as a simple dream. And what happened to me here the other day," he went on, "failed to make it a reality again!"

Agatha looked at him a moment in silence, and saw again that he was handsome and kind; and then dropping a sigh over the wonderful mystery of things, she turned sadly away. That evening, Diana said to her—

"I know that you have seen him!"

Agatha came to her and kissed her.

"And I am nothing to him now?"

"My own dearest——" murmured Agatha.

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Diana had drunk the little phial of gold-coloured liquid ; but after this, she ceased to wander about the palace ; she never left her room. The old doctor was with her constantly now, and he continued to say that the air of Rome was very good for her complaint. Agatha watched her in helpless sadness ; she saw her fading and sinking, and yet she was unable to comfort her. She tried once to comfort her by saying hard things about Mr. Longstaff, by pointing out that he had not been honourable ; rising herein to a sublime hypocrisy, for on that last occasion at St. Peter's the poor girl had felt that she herself admired him as much as ever—that the timid little flame which was kindled at Nice was beginning to shoot up again. Agatha saw nothing but his good looks and his kind manner.

"What did he want—what did he mean, after all ? " she pretended to murmur, leaning over Diana's sofa. "Why should he have been wounded at what you said ? It would have been part of the bargain that he should not get well. Did he mean to take an unfair advantage—to make you his wife under false pretences ? When you put your finger on the weak spot, why should he resent it ? No, it was not honourable."

Diana smiled sadly ; she had no false shame now, and she spoke of this thing as if it concerned another person.

"He would have counted on my forgiving him ! " she said. A little while after this, she began to sink more rapidly. Then she called her friend to her, and said simply, "Send for him !" And as Agatha looked perplexed and distressed, she added, "I know he is still in Rome."

Agatha at first was at a loss where to find him, but among the benefits of the papal dispensation was the fact that the pontifical police could instantly help

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you to lay your hand upon any sojourner in the Eternal City. Mr. Longstaff had a passport in detention by the government, and this document formed a basis of instruction to the servant whom Agatha sent to interrogate the authorities. The servant came back with the news that he had seen the distinguished stranger, who would wait upon the ladies at the hour they proposed. When this hour came and Mr. Longstaff was announced, Diana said to her companion that she must remain with her. It was an afternoon in spring; the high windows into the ancient garden were open, and the room was adorned with great sheaves and stacks of the abundant Roman flowers. Diana sat in a deep arm-chair.

It was certainly a difficult position for Reginald Longstaff. He stopped on the threshold and looked a while at the woman to whom he had made his extraordinary offer; then, pale and agitated, he advanced rapidly towards her. He was evidently shocked at the state in which he found her; he took her hand, and, bending over it, raised it to his lips. She fixed her eyes on him a little, and she smiled a little.

"It is I who am dying now," she said. "And now I want to ask something of *you*—to ask what you asked of me."

He stared, and a deep flush of colour came into his face; he hesitated for an appreciable moment. Then lowering his head with a movement of assent he kissed her hand again.

"Come back to-morrow," she said; "that is all I ask of you."

He looked at her again for a while in silence; then he abruptly turned and left her. She sent for the English clergyman and told him that she was a dying woman, and that she wished the marriage

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service to be read beside her couch. The clergyman, too, looked at her in much surprise ; but he consented to humour so tenderly romantic a whim and made an appointment for the afternoon of the morrow. Diana was very tranquil. She sat motionless, with her hands clasped and her eyes closed. Agatha wandered about, arranging and re-arranging the flowers. On the morrow she encountered Mr. Longstaff in one of the outer rooms : he had come before his time. She made this objection to his being admitted ; but he answered that he knew he was early and had come with intention ; he wished to spend the intervening hour with his prospective bride. So he went in and sat down by her couch again, and Agatha, leaving them alone, never knew what passed between them. At the end of the hour the clergyman arrived, and read the marriage service to them, pronouncing the nuptial blessing, while Agatha stood by as witness. Mr. Longstaff went through all this with a solemn, inscrutable face, and Agatha, observing him, said to herself that one must at least do him the justice to admit that he was performing punctiliously what honour demanded. When the clergyman had gone he asked Diana when he might see her again.

" Never ! " she said, with her strange smile. And she added—" I shall not live long now."

He kissed her face, but he was obliged to leave her. He gave Agatha an anxious look as if he wished to say something to her, but she preferred not to listen to him. After this Diana sank rapidly. The next day Reginald Longstaff came back and insisted upon seeing Agatha.

" Why should she die ? " he asked. " I want her to live."

" Have you forgiven her ? " said Agatha.

" She saved me ! " he cried.

Diana consented to see him once more ; there

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were two doctors in attendance now, and they also had consented. He knelt down beside her bed and asked her to live. But she feebly shook her head.

"It would be wrong of me," she said.

Later, when he came back once more, Agatha told him she was gone. He stood wondering, with tears in his eyes

"I don't understand," he said. "Did she love me or not?"

"She loved you," said Agatha, "more than she believed you could now love her, and it seemed to her that, when she had had her moment of happiness, to leave you at liberty was the tenderest way she could show it."



# EUGENE PICKERING



# I

It was at Homburg, several years ago, before the gaming had been suppressed. The evening was very warm, and all the world was gathered on the terrace of the Kursaal and the esplanade below it, to listen to the excellent orchestra ; or half the world, rather, for the crowd was equally dense in the gaming-rooms, around the tables. Everywhere the crowd was great. The night was perfect, the season was at its height, the open windows of the Kursaal sent long shafts of unnatural light into the dusky woods, and now and then, in the intervals of the music, one might almost hear the clink of the napoleons and the metallic call of the croupiers rise above the watching silence of the saloons. I had been strolling with a friend, and we at last prepared to sit down. Chairs, however, were scarce. I had captured one, but it seemed no easy matter to find a mate for it. I was on the point of giving up in despair and proposing an adjournment to the silken ottomans of the Kursaal, when I observed a young man lounging back on one of the objects of my quest, with his feet supported on the rounds of another. This was more than his share of luxury, and I promptly approached him. He evidently belonged to the race which has the credit of knowing best, at home and abroad, how to make itself comfortable ; but something in his appearance suggested that his present attitude was the result of

inadvertence rather than of egotism. He was staring at the conductor of the orchestra and listening intently to the music. His hands were locked round his long legs, and his mouth was half open, with rather a foolish air. "There are so few chairs," I said, "that I must beg you to surrender this second one." He started, stared, blushed, pushed the chair away with awkward alacrity, and murmured something about not having noticed that he had it.

"What an odd-looking youth!" said my companion, who had watched me, as I seated myself beside her.

"Yes, he is odd-looking; but what is odder still is that I have seen him before, that his face is familiar to me, and yet that I can't place him." The orchestra was playing the Prayer from *Der Freischütz*, but Weber's lovely music only deepened the blank of memory. Who the deuce was he? where, when, how, had I known him? It seemed extraordinary that a face should be at once so familiar and so strange. We had our backs turned to him, so that I could not look at him again. When the music ceased we left our places, and I went to consign my friend to her mamma on the terrace. In passing, I saw that my young man had departed; I concluded that he only strikingly resembled some one I knew. But who in the world was it he resembled? The ladies went off to their lodgings, which were near by, and I turned into the gaming-rooms and hovered about the circle at roulette. Gradually, I filtered through to the inner edge, near the table, and, looking round, saw my puzzling friend stationed opposite to me. He was watching the game, with his hands in his pockets; but singularly enough, now that I observed him at my leisure, the look of familiarity quite faded from his face. What had made us call his appearance odd was his great length and leanness of limb, his long, white neck, his blue, pro-

minent eyes, and his ingenuous, unconscious absorption in the scene before him. He was not handsome, certainly, but he looked peculiarly amiable; and if his overt wonderment savoured a trifle of rurality, it was an agreeable contrast to the hard, inexpressive masks about him. He was the verdant offshoot, I said to myself, of some ancient, rigid stem; he had been brought up in the quietest of homes, and he was having his first glimpse of life. I was curious to whether he would put anything on the table; he evidently felt the temptation, but he seemed paralysed by chronic embarrassment. He stood gazing at the chinking complexity of losses and gains, shaking his loose gold in his pocket, and every now and then passing his hand nervously over his eyes.

Most of the spectators were too attentive to the play to have many thoughts for each other; but before long I noticed a lady who evidently had an eye for her neighbours as well as for the table. She was seated about half way between my friend and me, and I presently observed that she was trying to catch his eye. Though at Homburg, as people said, "one could never be sure," I yet doubted whether this lady were one of those whose especial vocation it was to catch a gentleman's eye. She was youthful rather than elderly, and pretty rather than plain; indeed, a few minutes later, when I saw her smile, I thought her wonderfully pretty. She had a charming grey eye and a good deal of yellow hair disposed in picturesque disorder, and though her features were meagre and her complexion faded, she gave one a sense of sentimental, artificial gracefulness. She was dressed in white muslin very much puffed and frilled, but a trifle the worse for wear, relieved here and there by a pale blue ribbon. I used to flatter myself on guessing at people's nationality by their faces, and, as a rule, I guessed aright. This faded, crumpled, vaporous

beauty. I conceived, was a German—such a German, somehow, as I had seen imagined in literature. Was she not a friend of poets, a correspondent of philosophers, a muse, a priestess of esthetics—something in the way of a Bettina, a Rahel? My conjectures, however, were speedily merged in wonderment as to what my diffident friend was making of her. She caught his eye at last, and raising an ungloved hand, adorned altogether with blue-gemmed rings—turquoise, sapphires, and lapis—she beckoned him to come to her. The gesture was executed with a sort of practised coolness and accompanied with an appealing smile. He stared a moment, rather blankly, unable to suppose that the invitation was addressed to him; then, as it was immediately repeated with a good deal of intensity, he blushed to the roots of his hair, wavered awkwardly, and at last made his way to the lady's chair. By the time he reached it he was crimson, and wiping his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief. She tilted back, looked up at him with the same smile, laid two fingers on his sleeve, and said something, interrogatively, to which he replied by a shake of the head. She was asking him, evidently, if he had ever played, and he was saying no. Old players have a fancy that when luck has turned her back on them, they can put her into good-humour again by having their stakes placed by a novice. Our young man's physiognomy had seemed to his new acquaintance to express the perfection of inexperience, and, like a practical woman, she had determined to make him serve her turn. Unlike most of her neighbours, she had no little pile of gold before her, but she drew from her pocket a double napoleon, put it into his hand and bade him place it on a number of his own choosing. He was evidently filled with a sort of delightful trouble; he enjoyed the adventure, but he shrank from the hazard. I would have staked the

coin on its being his companion's last ; for, although she still smiled intently as she watched his hesitation, there was anything but indifference in her pale, pretty face. Suddenly, in desperation, he reached over and laid the piece on the table. My attention was diverted at this moment by my having to make way for a lady with a great many flounces, before me, to give up her chair to a rustling friend to whom she had promised it ; when I again looked across at the lady in white muslin, she was drawing in a very goodly pile of gold with her little blue-gemmed claw. Good luck and bad, at the Homburg tables, were equally undemonstrative, and this happy adventuress rewarded her young friend for the sacrifice of his innocence with a single, rapid, upward smile. He had innocence enough left, however, to look round the table with a gleeful, conscious laugh, in the midst of which his eyes encountered my own. Then, suddenly the familiar look which had vanished from his face flickered up unmistakably ; it was the boyish laugh of a boyhood's friend. Stupid fellow that I was, I had been looking at Eugene Pickering !

Though I lingered on for some time longer, he failed to recognise me. Recognition, I think, had kindled a smile in my own face ; but, less fortunate than he, I suppose my smile had ceased to be boyish. Now that luck had faced about again, his companion played for herself—played and won, hand over hand. At last she seemed disposed to rest on her gains, and proceeded to bury them in the folds of her muslin. Pickering had staked nothing for himself, but as he saw her prepare to withdraw, he offered her a double napoleon and begged her to place it. She shook her head with great decision, and seemed to bid him put it up again ; but he, still blushing a good deal, pressed her with awkward ardour, and she at last took it from him, looked at him a moment fixedly, and laid it on a

number. A moment later the croupier was raking it in. She gave the young man a little nod which seemed to say, "I told you so"; he glanced round the table again and laughed; she left her chair, and he made a way for her through the crowd. Before going home I took a turn on the terrace and looked down on the esplanade. The lamps were out, but the warm starlight vaguely illumined a dozen figures scattered in couples. One of these figures, I thought, was a lady in a white dress.

I had no intention of letting Pickering go without reminding him of our old acquaintance. He had been a very singular boy, and I was curious to see what had become of his singularity. I looked for him the next morning at two or three of the hotels, and at last I discovered his whereabouts. But he was out, the waiter said; he had gone to walk an hour before. I went my way confident that I should meet him in the evening. It was the rule with the Homburg world to spend its evenings at the Kursaal, and Pickering, apparently, had already discovered a good reason for not being an exception. One of the charms of Homburg is the fact that of a hot day you may walk about for a whole afternoon in unbroken shade. The umbrageous gardens of the Kursaal mingle with the charming Hardtwald, which in turn melts away into the wooded slopes of the Taunus Mountains. To the Hardtwald I bent my steps, and strolled for an hour through mossy glades and the still, perpendicular gloom of the fir-woods. Suddenly, on the grassy margin of a by-path, I came upon a young man stretched at his length in the sun-checkered shade and kicking his heels towards a patch of blue sky. My step was so noiseless on the turf, that before he saw me I had time to recognise Pickering again. He looked as if he had been lounging there for some time; his hair was tossed about as if he had been sleeping;



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on the grass near him, beside his hat and stick, lay a sealed letter. When he perceived me he jerked himself forward, and I stood looking at him without introducing myself—purposely, to give him a chance to recognise me. He put on his glasses, being awkwardly near-sighted, and stared up at me with an air of general trustfulness, but without a sign of knowing me. So at last I introduced myself. Then he jumped up and grasped my hands and stared and blushed and laughed and began a dozen random questions, ending with a demand as to how in the world I had known him.

“Why, you are not changed so utterly,” I said; “and after all, it’s but fifteen years since you used to do my Latin exercises for me.”

“Not changed, eh?” he answered, still smiling, and yet speaking with a sort of ingenuous dismay.

Then I remembered that poor Pickering had been in those Latin days a victim of juvenile irony. He used to bring a bottle of medicine to school and take a dose in a glass of water before lunch; and every day at two o’clock, half an hour before the rest of us were liberated, an old nurse with bushy eyebrows came and fetched him away in a carriage. His extremely fair complexion, his nurse, and his bottle of medicine, which suggested a vague analogy with the sleeping-potion in the tragedy, caused him to be called Juliet. Certainly, Romeo’s sweetheart hardly suffered more; she was not, at least, a standing joke in Verona. Remembering these things, I hastened to say to Pickering that I hoped he was still the same good fellow who used to do my Latin for me. “We were capital friends, you know,” I went on, “then and afterwards.”

“Yes, we were very good friends,” he said, “and that makes it the stranger I shouldn’t have known you. For you know as a boy I never had many

friends, nor as a man either. You see," he added, passing his hand over his eyes, "I am rather dazed, rather bewildered at finding myself for the first time—alone." And he jerked back his shoulders nervously and threw up his head, as if to settle himself in an unwonted position. I wondered whether the old nurse with the bushy eyebrows had remained attached to his person up to a recent period, and discovered presently that, virtually at least, she had. We had the whole summer day before us, and we sat down on the grass together and overhauled our old memories. It was as if we had stumbled upon an ancient cupboard in some dusky corner, and rummaged out a heap of childish playthings—tin soldiers and torn story-books, jack-knives and Chinese puzzles. This is what we remembered between us.

He had made but a short stay at school—not because he was tormented, for he thought it so fine to be at school at all that he held his tongue at home about the sufferings incurred through the medicine-bottle; but because his father thought he was learning bad manners. This he imparted to me in confidence at the time, and I remember how it increased my oppressive awe of Mr. Pickering, who had appeared to me in glimpses as a sort of high-priest of the proprieties. Mr. Pickering was a widower—a fact which seemed to produce in him a sort of preternatural concentration of parental dignity. He was a majestic man, with a hooked nose, a keen, dark eye, very large whiskers, and notions of his own as to how a boy—or his boy, at any rate—should be brought up. First and foremost, he was to be a "gentleman"; which seemed to mean, chiefly, that he was always to wear a muffler and gloves, and be sent to bed, after a supper of bread and milk, at eight o'clock. School-life, on experiment, seemed hostile to these observances, and Eugene was taken home again, to be moulded into urbanity beneath

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the parental eye. A tutor was provided for him, and a single select companion was prescribed. The choice, mysteriously, fell on me, born as I was under quite another star; my parents were appealed to, and I was allowed for a few months to have my lessons with Eugene. The tutor, I think, must have been rather a snob, for Eugene was treated like a prince, while I got all the questions and the raps with the ruler. And yet I remember never being jealous of my happier comrade, and striking up, for the time, one of those friendships of childhood. He had a watch and a pony and a great store of picture-books, but my envy of these luxuries was tempered by a vague compassion which left me free to be generous. I could go out to play alone, I could button my jacket myself, and sit up till I was sleepy. Poor Pickering could never take a step without asking leave, or spend half an hour in the garden without a formal report of it when he came in. My parents, who had no desire to see me inoculated with importunate virtues, sent me back to school at the end of six months. After that I never saw Eugene. His father went to live in the country, to protect the lad's morals, and Eugene faded, in reminiscence, into a pale image of the depressing effects of education. I think I vaguely supposed that he would melt into thin air, and indeed began gradually to doubt of his existence and to regard him as one of the foolish things one ceased to believe in as one grew older. It seemed natural that I should have no more news of him. Our present meeting was my first assurance that he had really survived all that muffling and coddling.

I observed him now with a good deal of interest, for he was a rare phenomenon—the fruit of a system persistently and uninterruptedly applied. He struck me, in a fashion, as certain young monks I had seen in Italy; he had the same candid, unsophisticated

cloister-face. His education had been really almost monastic. It had found him evidently a very compliant, yielding subject ; his gentle, affectionate spirit was not one of those that need to be broken. It had bequeathed him, now that he stood on the threshold of the great world, an extraordinary freshness of impression and alertness of desire, and I confess that, as I looked at him and met his transparent blue eye, I trembled for the unwarned innocence of such a soul. I became aware, gradually, that the world had already wrought a certain work upon him and roused him to a restless, troubled self-consciousness. Everything about him pointed to an experience from which he had been debarred ; his whole organism trembled with a dawning sense of unsuspected possibilities of feeling. This appealing tremor was indeed outwardly visible. He kept shifting himself about on the grass, thrusting his hands through his hair, wiping a light perspiration from his forehead, breaking out to say something and rushing off to something else. Our sudden meeting had greatly excited him, and I saw that I was likely to profit by a certain overflow of sentimental fermentation. I could do so with a good conscience, for all this trepidation filled me with a great friendliness.

" It's nearly fifteen years, as you say," he began, " since you used to call me ' butter-fingers ' for always missing the ball. That's a long time to give an account of, and yet they have been, for me, such eventless, monotonous years, that I could almost tell their history in ten words. You, I suppose, have had all kinds of adventures and travelled over half the world. I remember you had a turn for deeds of daring ; I used to think you a little Captain Cook in roundabouts, for climbing the garden fence to get the ball, when I had let it fly over. I climbed no fences then or since. You remember my father, I

suppose, and the great care he took of me? I lost him some five months ago. From those boyish days up to his death we were always together. I don't think that in fifteen years we spent half-a-dozen hours apart. We lived in the country, winter and summer, seeing but three or four people. I had a succession of tutors, and a library to browse about in; I assure you I am a tremendous scholar. It was a dull life for a growing boy, and a duller life for a young man grown, but I never knew it. I was perfectly happy." He spoke of his father at some length, and with a respect which I privately declined to emulate. Mr. Pickering had been, to my sense, a frigid egotist, unable to conceive of any larger vocation for his son than to strive to reproduce so irreproachable a model. "I know I have been strangely brought up," said my friend, "and that the result is something grotesque; but my education, piece by piece, in detail, became one of my father's personal habits, as it were. He took a fancy to it at first through his intense affection for my mother and the sort of worship he paid her memory. She died at my birth, and as I grew up, it seems that I bore an extraordinary likeness to her. Besides, my father had a great many theories; he prided himself on his conservative opinions; he thought the usual American *laissez-aller* in education was a very vulgar practice, and that children were not to grow up like dusty thorns by the wayside. So you see," Pickering went on, smiling and blushing, and yet with something of the irony of vain regret, "I am a regular garden plant. I have been watched and watered and pruned, and if there is any virtue in tending I ought to take the prize at a flower-show. Some three years ago my father's health broke down, and he was kept very much within doors. So, although I was a man grown, I lived altogether at home. If I was out of his sight for a

quarter of an hour he sent some one after me. He had severe attacks of neuralgia, and he used to sit at his window, basking in the sun. He kept an opera-glass at hand, and when I was out in the garden he used to watch me with it. A few days before his death, I was twenty-seven years old, and the most innocent youth, I suppose, on the continent. After he died I missed him greatly," Pickering continued, evidently with no intention of making an epigram. "I stayed at home, in a sort of dull stupor. It seemed as if life offered itself to me for the first time, and yet as if I didn't know how to take hold of it."

He uttered all this with a frank eagerness which increased as he talked, and there was a singular contrast between the meagre experience he described and a certain radiant intelligence which I seemed to perceive in his glance and tone. Evidently he was a clever fellow, and his natural faculties were excellent. I imagined he had read a great deal, and recovered, in some degree, in restless intellectual conjecture, the freedom he was condemned to ignore in practice. Opportunity was now offering a meaning to the empty forms with which his imagination was stored, but it appeared to him dimly, through the veil of his personal diffidence.

"I have not sailed round the world, as you suppose," I said, "but I confess I envy you the novelties you are going to behold. Coming to Homburg you have plunged *in medias res*."

He glanced at me to see if my remark contained an allusion, and hesitated a moment. "Yes, I know it. I came to Bremen in the steamer with a very friendly German, who undertook to initiate me into the glories and mysteries of the fatherland. 'At this season, he said, I must begin with Homburg. I landed but a fortnight ago, and here I am.'" Again he hesitated, as if he were going to add something

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about the scene at the Kursaal; but suddenly, nervously, he took up the letter which was lying beside him, looked hard at the seal with a troubled frown, and then flung it back on the grass with a sigh.

"How long do you expect to be in Europe?" I asked.

"Six months, I supposed when I came. But not so long—now!" And he let his eyes wander to the letter again.

"And where shall you go—what shall you do?"

"Everywhere, everything, I should have said yesterday. But now it is different."

I glanced at the letter interrogatively, and he gravely picked it up and put it into his pocket. We talked for a while longer, but I saw that he had suddenly become preoccupied; that he was apparently weighing an impulse to break some last barrier of reserve. At last he suddenly laid his hand on my arm, looked at me a moment appealingly, and cried, "Upon my word I should like to tell you everything!"

"Tell me everything, by all means," I answered, smiling. "I desire nothing better than to lie here in the shade and hear everything."

"Ah, but the question is, will you understand it? No matter; you think me a queer fellow already. It's not easy, either, to tell you what I feel—not easy for so queer a fellow as I to tell you in how many ways he is queer!" He got up and walked away a moment, passing his hand over his eyes, then came back rapidly and flung himself on the grass again. "I said just now I always supposed I was happy; it's true; but now that my eyes are open, I see I was only stultified. I was like a poodle-dog that is led about by a blue ribbon, and scoured and combed and fed on slops. It was not life; life is learning to know one's self, and in that sense I have lived more in the past six weeks than in all the years that preceded

them. I am filled with this feverish sense of liberation ; it keeps rising to my head like the fumes of strong wine. I find I am an active, sentient, intelligent creature, with desires, with passions, with possible convictions—even with what I never dreamed of, a possible will of my own ! I find there is a world to know, a life to lead, men and women to form a thousand relations with. It all lies there like a great surging sea, where we must plunge and dive and feel the breeze and breast the waves. I stand shivering here on the brink, staring, longing, wondering, charmed by the smell of the brine and yet afraid of the water. The world beckons and smiles and calls, but a nameless influence from the past, that I can neither wholly obey nor wholly resist, seems to hold me back. I am full of impulses, but, somehow, I am not full of strength. Life seems inspiring at certain moments, but it seems terrible and unsafe ; and I ask myself why I should wantonly measure myself with merciless forces, when I have learned so well how to stand aside and let them pass. Why shouldn't I turn my back upon it all and go home to—what awaits me ?—to that sightless, soundless country life, and long days spent among old books ? But if a man is weak, he doesn't want to assent beforehand to his weakness ; he wants to taste whatever sweetness there may be in paying for the knowledge. So it is that it comes back—this irresistible impulse to take my plunge—to let myself swing, to go where liberty leads me." He paused a moment, fixing me with his excited eyes, and perhaps perceived in my own an irrepressible smile at his perplexity. " ' Swing ahead, in Heaven's name,' you want to say, ' and much good may it do you.' I don't know whether you are laughing at my scruples or at what possibly strikes you as my depravity. I doubt," he went on gravely, " whether I have an inclination toward wrong-doing ;



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if I have, I am sure I shall ~~not~~ prosper in it. I honestly believe I may safely take out a license to amuse myself. But it isn't that I think of, any more than I dream of playing with suffering. Pleasure and pain are empty words to me ; what I long for is knowledge—some other knowledge than comes to us in formal, colourless, impersonal precept. You would understand all this better if you could breathe for an hour the musty in-door atmosphere in which I have always lived. To break a window and let in light and air—I feel as if at last I must *act* ! ”

“ Act, by all means, now and always, when you have a chance,” I answered. “ But don't take things too hard, now or ever. Your long confinement makes you think the world better worth knowing than you are likely to find it. A man with as good a head and heart as yours has a very ample world within himself, and I am no believer in art for art, nor in what's called ‘ life ’ for life's sake. Nevertheless, take your plunge, and come and tell me whether you have found the pearl of wisdom.” He frowned a little, as if he thought my sympathy a trifle meagre. I shook him by the hand and laughed. “ The pearl of wisdom,” I cried, “ is love ; honest love in the most convenient concentration of experience ! I advise you to fall in love.” He gave me no smile in response, but drew from his pocket the letter of which I have spoken, held it up, and shook it solemnly. “ What is it ? ” I asked.

“ It is my sentence ! ”

“ Not of death, I hope ! ”

“ Of marriage.”

“ With whom ? ”

“ With a person I don't love.”

This was serious. I stopped smiling and begged him to explain.

“ It is the singular part of my story,” he said at

last. "It will remind you of an old-fashioned romance. Such as I sit here, talking in this wild way, and tossing off provocations to destiny, my destiny is settled and sealed. I am engaged, I am given in marriage. It's a bequest of the past—the past I had no hand in! The marriage was arranged by my father, years ago, when I was a boy. The young girl's father was his particular friend; he was also a widower, and was bringing up his daughter, on his side, in the same severe seclusion in which I was spending my days. To this day I am unacquainted with the origin of the bond of union between our respective progenitors. Mr. Vernor was largely engaged in business, and I imagine that once upon a time he found himself in a financial strait and was helped through it by my father's coming forward with a heavy loan, on which, in his situation, he could offer no security but his word. Of this my father was quite capable. He was a man of dogmas, and he was sure to have a rule of life—as clear as if it had been written out in his beautiful copper-plate hand—adapted to the conduct of a gentleman toward a friend in pecuniary embarrassment. What is more, he was sure to adhere to it. Mr. Vernor, I believe, got on his feet, paid his debt, and vowed my father an eternal gratitude. His little daughter was the apple of his eye, and he pledged himself to bring her up to be the wife of his benefactor's son. So our fate was fixed, parentally, and we have been educated for each other. I have not seen my betrothed since she was a very plain-faced little girl in a sticky pinafore, hugging a one-armed doll—of the male sex, I believe—as big as herself. Mr. Vernor is in what is called the Eastern trade, and has been living these many years at Smyrna. Isabel has grown up there in a white-walled garden, in an orange grove, between her father and her governess. She is a good deal my

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junior ; six months ago she was seventeen ; when she is eighteen we are to marry ! ”

He related all this calmly enough, without the accent of complaint, dryly rather and doggedly, as if he were weary of thinking of it. “ It’s a romance, indeed, for these dull days,” I said, “ and I heartily congratulate you. It’s not every young man who finds, on reaching the marrying age, a wife kept in a box of rose-leaves for him. A thousand to one Miss Vernor is charming ; I wonder you don’t post off to Smyrna.”

“ You are joking,” he answered, with a wounded air, “ and I am terribly serious. Let me tell you the rest. I never suspected this superior conspiracy till something less than a year ago. My father, wishing to provide against his death, informed me of it very solemnly. I was neither elated nor depressed ; I received it, as I remember, with a sort of emotion which varied only in degree from that with which I could have hailed the announcement that he had ordered me a set of new shirts. I supposed that was the way that all marriages were made ; I had heard of their being made in heaven, and what was my father but a divinity ? Novels and poems indeed talked about falling in love ; but novels and poems were one thing and life was another. A short time afterwards he introduced me to a photograph of my predestined, who has a pretty, but an extremely inanimate, face. After this his health failed rapidly. One night I was sitting, as I habitually sat for hours, in his dimly lighted room, near his bed, to which he had been confined for a week. He had not spoken for some time, and I supposed he was asleep ; but happening to look at him I saw his eyes wide open, and fixed on me strangely. He was smiling benignantly, intensely, and in a moment he beckoned to me. Then, on my going to him—‘ I feel that I shall not last

long,' he said ; ' but I am willing to die when I think how comfortably I have arranged your future.' He was talking of death, and anything but grief at that moment was doubtless impious and monstrous ; but there came into my heart for the first time a throbbing sense of being over-governed. I said nothing, and he thought my silence was all sorrow. ' I shall not live to see you married,' he went on, ' but since the foundation is laid, that little signifies ; it would be a selfish pleasure, and I have never thought of myself but in you. To foresee your future, in its main outline, to know to a certainty that you will be safely domiciled here, with a wife approved by my judgement, cultivating the moral fruit of which I have sown the seed—this will content me. But, my son, I wish to clear this bright vision from the shadow of a doubt. I believe in your docility ; I believe I may trust the salutary force of your respect for my memory. But I must remember that when I am removed, you will stand here alone, face to face with a hundred nameless temptations to perversity. The fumes of unrighteous pride may rise into your brain and tempt you, in the interest of a vulgar theory which it will call your independence, to shatter the edifice I have so laboriously constructed. So I must ask you for a promise—the solemn promise you owe my condition.' And he grasped my hand. ' You will follow the path I have marked ; you will be faithful to the young girl whom an influence as devoted as that which has governed your own young life has moulded into everything amiable ; you will marry Isabel Vernor.' This was pretty ' steep ' as we used to say at school. I was frightened ; I drew away my hand and asked to be trusted without any such terrible vow. My reluctance startled my father into a suspicion that the vulgar theory of independence had already been whispering to me. He sat up in his bed and looked at

me with eyes which seemed to foresee a lifetime of odious ingratitude. I felt the reproach ; I feel it now. I promised ! And even now I don't regret my promise nor complain of my father's tenacity. I feel, somehow, as if the seeds of ultimate repose had been sown in those unsuspecting years—as if after many days I might gather the mellow fruit. But after many days ! I will keep my promise, I will obey ; but I want to *live* first ! ”

“ My dear fellow, you are living now. All this passionate consciousness of your situation is a very ardent life. I wish I could say as much for my own. ”

“ I want to forget my situation. I want to spend three months without thinking of the past or the future, grasping whatever the present offers me. Yesterday, I thought I was in a fair way to sail with the tide. But this morning comes this memento ! ” And he held up his letter again.

“ What is it ? ”

“ A letter from Smyrna. ”

“ I see you have not yet broken the seal. ”

“ No, nor do I mean to, for the present. It contains bad news. ”

“ What do you call *bad* news ? ”

“ News that I am expected in Smyrna in three weeks. News that Mr. Vernor disapproves of my roving about the world. News that his daughter is standing expectant at the altar. ”

“ Is not this pure conjecture ? ”

“ Conjecture, possibly, but safe conjecture. As soon as I looked at the letter, something smote me at the heart. Look at the device on the seal, and I am sure you will find it's *Tarry not* ! ” And he flung the letter on the grass.

“ Upon my word, you had better open it, ” I said.

“ If I were to open it and read my summons, do you know what I should do ? I should march home

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and ask the Oberkellner how one gets to Smyrna, pack my trunk, take my ticket, and not stop till I arrived. I know I should ; it would be the fascination of habit. The only way, therefore, to wander to my rope's end is to leave the letter unread."

"In your place," I said, "curiosity would make me open it."

He shook his head. "I have no curiosity ! For a long time now the idea of my marriage has ceased to be a novelty, and I have contemplated it mentally in every possible light. I fear nothing from that side, but I do fear something from conscience. I want my hands tied. Will you do me a favour ? Pick up the letter, put it into your pocket, and keep it till I ask you for it. When I do, you may know that I am at my rope's end."

I took the letter, smiling. "And how long is your rope to be ? The Homburg season doesn't last for ever."

"Does it last a month ? Let that be my season ! A month hence you will give it back to me."

"To-morrow, if you say so. Meanwhile, let it rest in peace !" And I consigned it to the most sacred interstice of my pocket-book. To say that I was disposed to humour the poor fellow would seem to be saying that I thought his request fantastic. It was his situation, by no fault of his own, that was fantastic, and he was only trying to be natural. He watched me put away the letter, and when it had disappeared gave a soft sigh of relief. The sigh was natural, and yet it set me thinking. His general recoil from an immediate responsibility imposed by others might be wholesome enough ; but if there was an old grievance on one side, was there not possibly a new-born delusion on the other ? It would be unkind to withhold a reflexion that might serve as a warning ; so I told him, abruptly, that I had been an un-

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discovered spectator, the night before, of his exploits at roulette.

He blushed deeply, but he met my eyes with the same clear good-humour.

"Ah, then you saw that wonderful lady?"

"Wonderful she was indeed. I saw her afterwards, too, sitting on the terrace in the starlight. I imagine she was not alone."

"No, indeed, I was with her—for nearly an hour. Then I walked home with her."

"Ah! And did you go in?"

"No, she said it was too late to ask me; though she remarked that in a general way she did not stand upon ceremony."

"She did herself injustice. When it came to losing our money for you, she made you insist."

"Ah, you noticed that too?" cried Pickering, still quite unconfused. "I felt as if the whole table were staring at me; but her manner was so gracious and reassuring that I supposed she was doing nothing unusual. She confessed, however, afterwards, that she is very eccentric. The world began to call her so, she said, before she ever dreamed of it, and at last, finding that she had the reputation, in spite of herself, she resolved to enjoy its privileges. Now, she does what she chooses."

"In other words, she is a lady with no reputation to lose!"

Pickering seemed puzzled; he smiled a little. "Is not that what you say of bad women?"

"Of some—of those who are found out."

"Well," he said, still smiling, "I have not yet found out Madame Blumenthal."

"If that's her name I suppose she's German."

"Yes; but she speaks English so well that you wouldn't know it. She is very clever. Her husband is dead."

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I laughed involuntarily at the conjunction of these facts, and Pickering's clear glance seemed to question my mirth. "You have been so bluntly frank with me," I said, "that I too must be frank. Tell me, if you can, whether this clever Madame Blumenthal, whose husband is dead, has given a point to your desire for a suspension of communication with Smyrna."

He seemed to ponder my question, unshrinkingly. "I think not," he said, at last. "I have had the desire for three months; I have known Madame Blumenthal for less than twenty-four hours."

"Very true. But when you found this letter of yours on your plate at breakfast, did you seem for a moment to see Madame Blumenthal sitting opposite?"

"Opposite?"

"Opposite, my dear fellow, or anywhere in the neighbourhood. In a word, does she interest you?"

"Very much!" he cried, joyously.

"Amen!" I answered, jumping up with a laugh. "And now, if we are to see the world in a month, there is no time to lose. Let us begin with the Hardtwald."

Pickering rose, and we strolled away into the forest, talking of lighter things. At last we reached the edge of the wood, sat down on a fallen log, and looked out across an interval of meadow at the long wooded waves of the Taunus. What my friend was thinking of, I can't say; I was meditating on his queer biography and letting my wonderment wander away to Smyrna. Suddenly I remembered that he possessed a portrait of the young girl who was waiting for him there in a white-walled garden. I asked him if he had it with him. He said nothing but gravely took out his pocket-book and drew forth a small photograph. It represented, as the poet says, a



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simple maiden in her flower—a slight young girl, with a certain childish roundness of contour. There was no ease in her posture ; she was standing, stiffly and shyly, for her likeness ; she wore a short-waisted white dress ; her arms hung at her sides and her hands were clasped in front ; her head was bent downward a little, and her dark eyes fixed. But her awkwardness was as pretty as that of some angular seraph in a medieval carving, and in her timid gaze there seemed to lurk the questioning gleam of childhood. “ What is this for ? ” her charming eyes appeared to ask ; “ why have I been dressed up for this ceremony in a white frock and amber beads ? ”

“ Gracious powers ! ” I said to myself ; “ what an enchanting thing is innocence ! ”

“ That portrait was taken a year and a half ago,” said Pickering, as if with an effort to be perfectly just. “ By this time, I suppose, she looks a little wiser.”

“ Not much, I hope,” I said, as I gave it back. “ She is very sweet ! ”

“ Yes, poor girl, she is very sweet—no doubt ! ” And he put the thing away without looking at it.

We were silent for some moments. At last, abruptly—“ My dear fellow,” I said, “ I should take some satisfaction in seeing you immediately leave Homburg.”

“ Immediately ? ”

“ To-day—as soon as you can get ready.”

He looked at me, surprised, and little by little he blushed. “ There is something I have not told you,” he said ; “ something that your saying that Madame Blumenthal has no reputation to lose has made me half afraid to tell you.”

“ I think I can guess it. Madame Blumenthal has asked you to come and play her game for her again.”

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"Not at all!" cried Pickering, with a smile of triumph. "She says that she means to play no more for the present. She has asked me to come and take tea with her this evening."

"Ah, then," I said, very gravely, "of course you can't leave Homburg."

He answered nothing, but looked askance at me, as if he were expecting me to laugh. "Urge it strongly," he said in a moment. "Say it's my duty—that I *must*."

I didn't quite understand him, but, feathering the shaft with a harmless expletive, I told him that unless he followed my advice I would never speak to him again.

He got up, stood before me, and struck the ground with his stick. "Good!" he cried, "I wanted an occasion to break a rule—to leap a barrier. Here it is! I stay!"

I made him a mock bow for his energy. "That's very fine," I said; "but now to put you in a proper mood for Madame Blumenthal's tea, we will go and listen to the band play Schubert under the lindens." And we walked back through the woods.

I went to see Pickering the next day, at his inn, and on knocking, as directed, at his door, was surprised to hear the sound of a loud voice within. My knock remained unnoticed, so I presently introduced myself. I found no company, but I discovered my friend walking up and down the room and apparently declaiming to himself from a little volume bound in white vellum. He greeted me heartily, threw his book on the table, and said that he was taking a German lesson.

"And who is your teacher?" I asked, glancing at the book.

He rather avoided meeting my eye, as he answered, after an instant's delay, "Madame Blumenthal."

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" Indeed ! Has she written a grammar ? "

" It's not a grammar ; it's a tragedy." And he handed me the book.

I opened it, and beheld, in delicate type, with a very large margin, an *Historisches Trauerspiel* in five acts, entitled *Cleopatra*. There were a great many marginal corrections and annotations, apparently from the author's hand ; the speeches were very long, and there was an inordinate number of soliloquies by the heroine. One of them, I remember, towards the end of the play, began in this fashion—

" What, after all, is life but sensation, and sensation but deception ?—reality that pales before the light of one's dreams, as Octavia's dull beauty fades beside mine ? But let me believe in some intenser bliss and seek it in the arms of death ! "

" It seems decidedly passionate," I said. " Has the tragedy ever been acted ? "

" Never in public ; but Madame Blumenthal tells me that she had it played at her own house in Berlin, and that she herself undertook the part of the heroine."

Pickering's unworldly life had not been of a sort to sharpen his perception of the ridiculous, but it seemed to me an unmistakable sign of his being under the charm, that this information was very soberly offered. He was preoccupied, he was irresponsible to my experimental observations on vulgar topics—the hot weather, the inn, the advent of Adelina Patti. At last, uttering his thoughts, he announced that Madame Blumenthal had proved to be an extraordinarily interesting woman. He seemed to have quite forgotten our long talk in the Hardtwald, and betrayed no sense of this being a confession that he had taken his plunge and was floating with the current. He only remembered that I had spoken slightly of the lady, and he now hinted that it behoved me to

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amend my opinion. I had received the day before so strong an impression of a sort of spiritual fastidiousness in my friend's nature, that on hearing now the striking of a new hour, as it were, in his consciousness, and observing how the echoes of the past were immediately quenched in its music, I said to myself that it had certainly taken a delicate hand to wind up that fine machine. No doubt Madame Blumenthal was a clever woman. It is a good German custom at Homburg to spend the hour preceding dinner in listening to the orchestra in the Kurgarten; Mozart and Beethoven, for organisms in which the interfusion of soul and sense is peculiarly mysterious, are a vigorous stimulus to the appetite. Pickering and I conformed, as we had done the day before, to the fashion, and when we were seated under the trees, he began to expatiate on his friend's merits.

"I don't know whether she is eccentric or not," he said; "to me every one seems eccentric, and it's not for me, yet awhile, to measure people by my narrow precedents. I never saw a gaming-table in my life before, and supposed that a gambler was of necessity some dusky villain with an evil eye. In Germany, says Madame Blumenthal, people play at roulette as they play at billiards, and her own venerable mother originally taught her the rules of the game. It is a recognised source of subsistence for decent people with small means. But I confess Madame Blumenthal might do worse things than play at roulette, and yet make them harmonious and beautiful. I have never been in the habit of thinking positive beauty the most excellent thing in a woman. I have always said to myself that if my heart were ever to be captured it would be by a sort of general grace—a sweetness of motion and tone—on which one could count for soothing impressions, as one counts on a musical instrument that is perfectly in tune.

Madame Blumenthal has it—this grace that soothes and satisfies ; and it seems the more perfect that it keeps order and harmony in a character really passionately ardent and active. With her eager nature and her innumerable accomplishments, nothing would be easier than that she should seem restless and aggressive. You will know her, and I leave you to judge whether she does seem so ! She has every gift, and culture has done everything for each. What goes on in her mind, I of course can't say ; what reaches the observer—the admirer—is simply a sort of fragrant emanation of intelligence and sympathy."

"Madame Blumenthal," I said, smiling, "might be the loveliest woman in the world, and you the object of her choicest favours, and yet what I should most envy you would be, not your peerless friend, but your beautiful imagination."

"That's a polite way of calling me a fool," said Pickering. "You are a sceptic, a cynic, a satirist ! I hope I shall be a long time coming to that."

"You will make the journey fast if you travel by express trains. But pray tell me, have you ventured to intimate to Madame Blumenthal your high opinion of her ?"

"I don't know what I may have said. She listens even better than she talks, and I think it possible I may have made her listen to a great deal of nonsense. For after the first few words I exchanged with her I was conscious of an extraordinary evaporation of all my old diffidence. I have, in truth, I suppose," he added, in a moment, "owing to my peculiar circumstances, a great accumulated fund of unuttered things of all sorts to get rid of. Last evening, sitting there before that charming woman, they came swarming to my lips. Very likely I poured them all out. I have a sense of having enshrouded myself in a sort of mist of talk, and of seeing her lovely eyes shining through

it opposite to me, like fog-lamps at sea." And here, if I remember rightly, Pickering broke off into an ardent parenthesis, and declared that Madame Blumenthal's eyes had something in them that he had never seen in any others. "It was a jumble of crudities, and inanities," he went on; "they must have seemed to her great rubbish; but I felt the wiser and the stronger, somehow, for having fired off all my guns—they could hurt nobody now if they hit—and I imagine I might have gone far without finding another woman in whom such an exhibition would have provoked so little of mere cold amusement."

"Madame Blumenthal, on the contrary," I surmised, "entered into your situation with warmth."

"Exactly so—the greatest! She has felt and suffered, and now she understands!"

"She told you, I imagine, that she understood you as if she had made you, and she offered to be your guide, philosopher, and friend."

"She spoke to me," Pickering answered, after a pause, "as I had never been spoken to before, and she offered me formally all the offices of a woman's friendship."

"Which you as formally accepted?"

"To you the scene sounds absurd, I suppose, but allow me to say I don't care!" Pickering spoke with an air of genial defiance which was the most in-offensive thing in the world. "I was very much moved; I was, in fact, very much excited. I tried to say something, but I couldn't; I had had plenty to say before, but now I stammered and bungled, and at last I bolted out of the room."

"Meanwhile she had dropped her tragedy into your pocket!"

"Not at all. I had seen it on the table before she came in. Afterwards she kindly offered to read

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German aloud with me, for the accent, two or three times a week. 'What shall we begin with?' she asked. 'With this!' I said, and held up the book. And she let me take it to look it over."

I was neither a cynic nor a satirist, but even if I had been, I might have been disarmed by Pickering's assurance, before we parted, that Madame Blumenthal wished to know me and expected him to introduce me. Among the foolish things which, according to his own account, he had uttered, were some generous words in my praise, to which she had civilly replied. I confess I was curious to see her, but I begged that the introduction should not be immediate, for I wished to let Pickering work out his destiny alone. For some days I saw little of him, though we met at the Kursaal and strolled occasionally in the park. I watched, in spite of my desire to let him alone, for the signs and portents of the world's action upon him—of that portion of the world, in especial, of which Madame Blumenthal had constituted herself the agent. He seemed very happy, and gave me in a dozen ways an impression of increased self-confidence and maturity. His mind was admirably active, and always, after a quarter of an hour's talk with him, I asked myself what experience could really do, that innocence had not done, to make it bright and fine. I was struck with his deep enjoyment of the whole spectacle of foreign life—its novelty, its picturesqueness, its light and shade—and with the infinite freedom with which he felt he could go and come and rove and linger and observe it all. It was an expansion, an awakening, a coming to moral manhood. Each time I met him he spoke a little less of Madame Blumenthal; but he let me know generally that he saw her often, and continued to admire her. I was forced to admit to myself, in spite of preconceptions, that if she were really the ruling star of this happy season, she must

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be a very superior woman. Pickering had the air of an ingenuous young philosopher sitting at the feet of an austere muse, and not of a sentimental spend-thrift dangling about some supreme incarnation of levity.



## II

MADAME BLUMENTHAL seemed, for the time, to have abjured the Kursaal, and I never caught a glimpse of her. Her young friend, apparently, was an interesting study, and the studious mind prefers seclusion.

She reappeared, however, at last, one evening at the opera, where from my chair I perceived her in a box, looking extremely pretty. Adelina Patti was singing, and after the rising of the curtain I was occupied with the stage ; but on looking round when it fell for the *entr'acte*, I saw that the authoress of *Cleopatra* had been joined by her young admirer. He was sitting a little behind her, leaning forward, looking over her shoulder and listening, while she, slowly moving her fan to and fro and letting her eye wander over the house, was apparently talking of this person and that. No doubt she was saying sharp things ; but Pickering was not laughing ; his eyes were following her covert indications ; his mouth was half open, as it always was when he was interested ; he looked intensely serious. I was glad that, having her back to him, she was unable to see how he looked. It seemed the proper moment to present myself and make her my bow ; but just as I was about to leave my place, a gentleman, whom in a moment I perceived to be an old acquaintance, came to occupy the next chair. Recognition and mutual greetings followed,

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and I was forced to postpone my visit to Madame Blumenthal. I was not sorry, for it very soon occurred to me that Niedermeyer would be just the man to give me a fair prose version of Pickering's lyric tributes to his friend. He was an Austrian by birth, and had formerly lived about Europe a great deal in a series of small diplomatic posts. England especially he had often visited, and he spoke the language almost without accent. I had once spent three rainy days with him in the house of an English friend in the country. He was a sharp observer and a good deal of a gossip; he knew a little something about every one, and about some people everything. His knowledge on social matters generally had the quality of all German science; it was copious, minute, exhaustive.

"Do tell me," I said, as we stood looking round the house, "who and what is the lady in white, with the young man sitting behind her."

"Who?" he answered, dropping his glass. "Madame Blumenthal! What? It would take long to say. Be introduced; it's easily done; you will find her charming. Then, after a week, you will tell me what she is."

"Perhaps I should not. My friend there has known her a week, and I don't think he is yet able to give a coherent account of her."

He raised his glass again, and after looking a while, "I am afraid your friend is a little—what do you call it?—a little 'soft.' Poor fellow! he's not the first. I have never known this lady that she has not had some eligible youth hovering about in some such attitude as that, undergoing the softening process. She looks wonderfully well, from here. It's extraordinary how those women last!"

"You don't mean, I take it, when you talk about 'those women,' that Madame Blumenthal is not

embalmed, for duration, in a certain infusion of respectability ? ”

“ Yes and no. The atmosphere that surrounds her is entirely of her own making. There is no reason in her antecedents that people should drop their voice when they speak of her. But some women are never at their ease till they have given some damnable twist or other to their position before the world. The attitude of upright virtue is unbecoming, like sitting too straight in a fauteuil. Don’t ask me for opinions, however ; content yourself with a few facts and with an anecdote. Madame Blumenthal is Prussian, and very well born. I remember her mother, an old Westphalian Gräfin, with principles marshalled out like Frederick the Great’s grenadiers. She was poor, however, and her principles were an insufficient dowry for Anastasia, who was married very young to a vicious Jew, twice her own age. He was supposed to have money, but I am afraid he had less than was nominated in the bond, or else that his pretty young wife spent it very fast. She has been a widow these six or eight years, and has lived, I imagine, in rather a hand-to-mouth fashion. I suppose she is some six or eight-and-thirty years of age. In winter one hears of her in Berlin, giving little suppers to the artistic rabble there ; in summer one often sees her across the green table at Ems and Wiesbaden. She’s very clever, and her cleverness has spoiled her. A year after her marriage she published a novel, with her views on matrimony, in the George Sand manner—beating the drum to Madame Sand’s trumpet. No doubt she was very unhappy ; Blumenthal was an old beast. Since then she has published a lot of literature—novels and poems and pamphlets on every conceivable theme, from the conversion of Lola Montez to the Hegelian philosophy. Her talk is much better than her writing. Her *conjugophobia*—I can’t call it by any other name

—made people think lightly of her at a time when her rebellion against marriage was probably only theoretic. She had a taste for spinning fine phrases, she drove her shuttle, and when she came to the end of her yarn, she found that society had turned its back. She tossed her head, declared that at last she could breathe the sacred air of freedom, and formally announced that she had embraced an ‘intellectual’ life. This meant unlimited *camaraderie* with scribblers and daubers, Hegelian philosophers and Hungarian pianists. But she has been admired also by a great many really clever men ; there was a time, in fact, when she turned a head as well set on its shoulders as this one !” And Niedermeyer tapped his forehead. “She has a great charm, and, literally, I know no harm of her. Yet for all that, I am not going to speak to her ; I am not going near her box. I am going to leave her to say, if she does me the honour to observe the omission, that I too have gone over to the Philistines. It’s not that ; it is that there is something sinister about the woman. I am too old for it to frighten me, but I am good-natured enough for it to pain me. Her quarrel with society has brought her no happiness, and her outward charm is only the mask of a dangerous discontent. Her imagination is lodged where her heart should be ! So long as you amuse it, well and good ; she’s radiant. But the moment you let it flag, she is capable of dropping you without a pang. If you land on your feet, you are so much the wiser, simply ; but there have been two or three, I believe, who have almost broken their necks in the fall.”

“You are reversing your promise,” I said, “and giving me an opinion, but not an anecdote.”

“This is my anecdote. A year ago a friend of mine made her acquaintance in Berlin, and though he was no longer a young man, and had never been what

is called a susceptible one, he took a great fancy to Madame Blumenthal. He's a major in the Prussian artillery—grizzled, grave, a trifle severe, a man every way firm in the faith of his fathers. It's a proof of Anastasia's charm that such a man should have got into the habit of going to see her every day of his life. But the major was in love, or next door to it ! Every day that he called he found her scribbling away at a little ormolu table on a lot of half-sheets of note-paper. She used to bid him sit down and hold his tongue for a quarter of an hour, till she had finished her chapter ; she was writing a novel, and it was promised to a publisher. Clorinda, she confided to him, was the name of the injured heroine. The major, I imagine, had never read a work of fiction in his life, but he knew by hearsay that Madame Blumenthal's literature, when put forth in pink covers, was subversive of several respectable institutions. Besides, he didn't believe in women knowing how to write at all, and it irritated him to see this inky goddess correcting proof-sheets under his nose—irritated him the more that, as I say, he was in love with her and that he ventured to believe she had a kindness for his years and his honours. And yet she was not such a woman as he could easily ask to marry him. The result of all this was that he fell into the way of railing at her intellectual pursuits and saying he should like to run his sword through her pile of papers. A woman was clever enough when she could guess her husband's wishes, and learned enough when she could read him the newspapers. At last, one day, Madame Blumenthal flung down her pen and announced in triumph that she had finished her novel. Clorinda had expired in the arms of—some one else than her husband. The major, by way of congratulating her, declared that her novel was immoral rubbish, and that her love of vicious paradoxes was only a

peculiarly depraved form of coquetry. He added, however, that he loved her in spite of her follies, and that if she would formally abjure them he would as formally offer her his hand. They say that women like to be snubbed by military men. I don't know, I'm sure ; I don't know how much pleasure, on this occasion, was mingled with Anastasia's wrath. But her wrath was very quiet, and the major assured me it made her look uncommonly pretty. ' I have told you before,' she says, ' that I write from an inner need. I write to unburden my heart, to satisfy my conscience. You call my poor efforts coquetry, vanity, the desire to produce a sensation. I can prove to you that it is the quiet labour itself I care for, and not the world's more or less flattering attention to it ! ' And seizing the history of Clorinda she thrust it into the fire. The major stands staring, and the first thing he knows she is sweeping him a great curtsey and bidding him farewell for ever. Left alone and recovering his wits, he fishes out Clorinda from the embers and then proceeds to thump vigorously at the lady's door. But it never opened, and from that day to the day three months ago when he told me the tale, he had not beheld her again."

" By Jove, it's a striking story," I said. " But the question is, what does it prove ? "

" Several things. First (what I was careful not to tell my friend), that Madame Blumenthal cared for him a trifle more than he supposed ; second, that he cares for her more than ever ; third, that the performance was a master-stroke, and that her allowing him to force an interview upon her again is only a question of time."

" And last ? " I asked.

" This is another anecdote. The other day, Under den Linden, I saw on a bookseller's counter a little pink-covered romance — *Sophronia*, by Madame

Blumenthal. Glancing through it, I observed an extraordinary abuse of asterisks ; every two or three pages the narrative was adorned with a portentous blank, crossed with a row of stars."

"Well, but poor Clorinda?" I objected, as Niedermeyer paused.

"Sophronia, my dear fellow, is simply Clorinda re-named by the baptism of fire. The fair author came back, of course, and found Clorinda tumbled upon the floor, a good deal scorched, but on the whole more frightened than hurt. She picks her up, brushes her off, and sends her to the printer. Wherever the flames had burnt a hole, she swings a constellation ! But if the major is prepared to drop a penitent tear over the ashes of Clorinda, I shall not whisper to him that the urn is empty."

Even Adelina Patti's singing, for the next half-hour, but half availed to divert me from my quickened curiosity to behold Madame Blumenthal face to face. As soon as the curtain had fallen again, I repaired to her box and was ushered in by Pickering with zealous hospitality. His glowing smile seemed to say to me "Ay, look for yourself, and adore !" Nothing could have been more gracious than the lady's greeting, and I found, somewhat to my surprise, that her prettiness lost nothing on a nearer view. Her eyes indeed were the finest I have ever seen—the softest, the deepest, the most intensely responsive. In spite of something faded and jaded in her physiognomy, her movements, her smile, and the tone of her voice, especially when she laughed, had an almost girlish frankness and spontaneity. She looked at you very hard with her radiant grey eyes, and she indulged while she talked in a superabundance of restless, rather affected little gestures, as if to make you take her meaning in a certain very particular and superfine sense. I wondered whether after a while this might not fatigue

one's attention ; then meeting her charming eyes, I said, Not for a long time. She was very clever, and, as Pickering had said, she spoke English admirably. I told her, as I took my seat beside her, of the fine things I had heard about her from my friend, and she listened, letting me go on some time, and exaggerate a little, with her fine eyes fixed full upon me. " Really ? " she suddenly said, turning short round upon Pickering, who stood behind us, and looking at him in the same way. " Is that the way you talk about me ? "

He blushed to his eyes, and I repented. She suddenly began to laugh ; it was then I observed how sweet her voice was in laughter. We talked after this of various matters, and in a little while I complimented her on her excellent English, and asked if she had learned it in England.

" Heaven forbid ! " she cried. " I have never been there and wish never to go. I should never get on with the—— " I wondered what she was going to say : the fogs, the smoke, or whist with sixpenny stakes ? —" I should never get on," she said, " with the aristocracy ! I am a fierce democrat—I am not ashamed of it. I hold opinions which would make my ancestors turn in their graves. I was born in the lap of feudalism. I am a daughter of the crusaders. But I am a revolutionist ! I have a passion for freedom—my idea of happiness is to die on a great barricade ! It's to your great country I should like to go. I should like to see the wonderful spectacle of a great people free to do everything it chooses, and yet never doing anything wrong ! "

I replied, modestly, that, after all, both our freedom and our good conduct had their limits, and she turned quickly about and shook her fan with a dramatic gesture at Pickering. " No matter, no matter ! " she cried, " I should like to see the country which



produced that wonderful young man. I think of it as a sort of Arcadia—a land of the golden age. He's so delightfully innocent ! In this stupid old Germany, if a young man is innocent he's a fool ; he has no brains ; he's not a bit interesting. But Mr. Pickering says the freshest things, and after I have laughed five minutes at their freshness it suddenly occurs to me that they are very wise, and I think them over for a week. True ! " she went on, nodding at him. " I call them inspired solecisms, and I treasure them up. Remember that when I next laugh at you ! "

Glancing at Pickering, I was prompted to believe that he was in a state of beatific exaltation which weighed Madame Blumenthal's smiles and frowns in an equal balance. They were equally hers ; they were links alike in the golden chain. He looked at me with eyes that seemed to say, " Did you ever hear such wit ? Did you ever see such grace ? " It seemed to me that he was but vaguely conscious of the meaning of her words ; her gestures, her voice and glance, made an absorbing harmony. There is something painful in the spectacle of absolute enthrallment, even to an excellent cause. I gave no response to Pickering's challenge, but made some remark upon the charm of Adelina Patti's singing. Madame Blumenthal, as became a " revolutionist," was obliged to confess that she could see no charm in it ; it was meagre, it was trivial, it lacked soul. " You must know that in music, too," she said, " I think for myself ! " And she began with a great many flourishes of her fan to explain what it was she thought. Remarkable things, doubtless ; but I cannot answer for it, for in the midst of the explanation the curtain rose again. " You can't be a great artist without a great passion ! " Madame Blumenthal was affirming. Before I had time to assent, Madame Patti's voice rose wheeling

like a skylark, and rained down its silver notes. " Ah, give me that art," I whispered, " and I will leave you your passion ! " And I departed for my own place in the orchestra. I wondered afterwards whether the speech had seemed rude, and inferred that it had not, on receiving a friendly nod from the lady, in the lobby, as the theatre was emptying itself. She was on Pickering's arm, and he was taking her to her carriage. Distances are short in Homburg, but the night was rainy, and Madame Blumenthal exhibited a very pretty satin-shod foot as a reason why, though but a penniless widow, she should not walk home. Pickering left us together a moment while he went to hail the vehicle, and my companion seized the opportunity, as she said, to beg me to be so very kind as to come and see her. It was for a particular reason ! It was reason enough for me, of course I answered, that she had given me leave. She looked at me a moment with that extraordinary gaze of hers, which seemed so absolutely audacious in its candour, and rejoined that I paid more compliments than our young friend there, but that she was sure I was not half so sincere. " But it's about him I want to talk," she said. " I want to ask you many things ; I want you to tell me all about him. He interests me ; but you see my sympathies are so intense, my imagination is so lively, that I don't trust my own impressions. They have misled me more than once ! " And she gave a little tragic shudder.

I promised to come and compare notes with her, and we bade her farewell at her carriage door. Pickering and I remained a while, walking up and down the long glazed gallery of the Kursaal. I had not taken many steps before I became aware that I was beside a man in the very extremity of love. " Isn't she wonderful ? " he asked, with an

implicit confidence in my sympathy which it cost me some ingenuity to elude. If he were really in love, well and good! For although, now that I had seen her, I stood ready to confess to large possibilities of fascination on Madame Blumenthal's part, and even to certain possibilities of sincerity of which my appreciation was vague, yet it seemed to me less ominous that he should be simply smitten than that his admiration should pique itself on being discriminating. It was on his fundamental simplicity that I counted for a happy termination of his experiment, and the former of these alternatives seemed to me the simpler. I resolved to hold my tongue and let him run his course. He had a great deal to say about his happiness, about the days passing like hours, the hours like minutes, and about Madame Blumenthal being a "revelation." "She was nothing to-night," he said; "nothing to what she sometimes is in the way of brilliancy—in the way of repartee. If you could only hear her when she tells her adventures!"

"Adventures?" I inquired. "Has she had adventures?"

"Of the most wonderful sort!" cried Pickering, with rapture. "She hasn't vegetated, like me! She has lived in the tumult of life. When I listen to her reminiscences, it's like hearing the opening tumult of one of Beethoven's symphonies, as it loses itself in a triumphant harmony of beauty and faith!"

I could only lift my eyebrows, but I desired to know before we separated what he had done with that troublesome conscience of his. "I suppose you know, my dear fellow," I said, "that you are simply in love. That's what they happen to call your state of mind."

He replied with a brightening eye, as if he were delighted to hear it—"So Madame Blumenthal told me only this morning!" And seeing, I suppose,

that I was slightly puzzled, "I went to drive with her," he continued; "we drove to Königstein, to see the old castle. We scrambled up into the heart of the ~~main~~ and sat for an hour in one of the crumbling old courts. Something in the solemn stillness of the place unloosed my tongue; and while she sat on an ivied stone, on the edge of the plunging wall, I stood there and made a speech. She listened to me, looking at me, breaking off little bits of stone and letting them drop down into the valley. At last she got up and nodded at me two or three times silently, with a smile, as if she were applauding me for a solo on the violin. 'You are in love,' she said. 'It's a perfect case!' And for some time she said nothing more. But before we left the place she told me that she owed me an answer to my speech. She thanked me heartily, but she was afraid that if she took me at my word she would be taking advantage of my inexperience. I had known few women; I was too easily picaed; I thought her better than she really was. She had great faults; I must know her longer and find them out; I must compare her with other women—women younger, simpler, more innocent, more ignorant; and then if I still did her the honour to think well of her, she would listen to me again. I told her that I was not afraid of preferring any woman in the world to her, and then she repeated, 'Happy man, happy man! you are in love, you are in love!'"

I called upon Madame Blumenthal a couple of days later, in some agitation of thought. It has been proved that there are, here and there, in the world, such people as sincere impostors; certain characters who cultivate fictitious emotions in perfect good faith. Even if this clever lady enjoyed poor Pickering's bedazzlement, it was conceivable that, taking vanity and charity together, she should care more for his

welfare than for her own entertainment ; and her offer to abide by the result of hazardous comparison with other women was a finer stroke than her reputation had led me to expect. She received me in a shabby little sitting-room, littered with uncut books and newspapers, many of which I saw at a glance were French. One side of it was occupied by an open piano, surmounted by a jar full of white roses. They perfumed the air ; they seemed to me to exhale the pure aroma of Pickering's devotion. Buried in an arm-chair, the object of this devotion was reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The purpose of my visit was not to admire Madame Blumenthal on my own account, but to ascertain how far I might safely leave her to work her will upon my friend. She had unpunged my sincerity the evening of the opera, and I was careful on this occasion to abstain from compliments and not to place her on her guard against my penetration. It is needless to narrate our interview in detail ; indeed, to tell the perfect truth, I was punished for my rash attempt to surprise her, by a temporary eclipse of my own perspicacity. She sat there so questioning, so perceptive, so genial, so generous, and so pretty withal, that I was quite ready at the end of half an hour to subscribe to the most comprehensive of Pickering's rhapsodies. She was certainly a wonderful woman. I have never liked to linger, in memory, on that half-hour. The result of it was to prove that there were many more things in the composition of a woman who, as Niedermeyer said, had lodged her imagination in the place of her heart, than were dreamt of in my philosophy. Yet, as I sat there stroking my hat and balancing the account between nature and art in my affable hostess, I felt like a very competent philosopher. She had said she wished me to tell her everything about our friend, and she questioned me as to his family, his

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fortune, his antecedents and his character. All this was natural in a woman who had received a passionate declaration of love, and it was expressed with an air of charmed solicitude, a radiant confidence that there was really no mistake about his being a most distinguished young man, and that if I chose to be explicit, I might deepen her conviction to disinterested ecstasy, which might have almost provoked me to invent a good opinion, if I had not had one ready made. I told her that she really knew Pickering better than I did, and that until we met at Homburg I had not seen him since he was a boy.

"But he talks to you freely," she answered; "I know you are his confidant. He has told me certainly a great many things, but I always feel as if he were keeping something back; as if he were holding something behind him, and showing me only one hand at once. He seems often to be hovering on the edge of a secret. I have had several friendships in my life—thank Heaven! but I have had none more dear to me than this one. Yet in the midst of it I have the painful sense of my friend being half afraid of me; of his thinking me terrible, strange, perhaps a trifle out of my wits. Poor me! If he only knew what a plain good soul I am, and how I only want to know him and befriend him!"

These words were full of a plaintive magnanimity which made mistrust seem cruel. How much better I might play providence over Pickering's experiments with life, if I could engage the fine instincts of this charming woman on the providential side! Pickering's secret was, of course, his engagement to Miss Vernor; it was natural enough that he should have been unable to bring himself to talk of it to Madame Blumenthal. The simple sweetness of this young girl's face had not faded from my memory; I could not rid myself of the suspicion that in going further

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Pickering might fare much worse. Madame Blumenthal's professions seemed a virtual promise to agree with me, and after some hesitation I said that my friend had, in fact, a substantial secret, and that perhaps I might do him a good turn by putting her in possession of it. In as few words as possible I told her that Pickering stood pledged by filial piety to marry a young lady at Smyrna. She listened intently to my story ; when I had finished it there was a faint flush of excitement in each of her cheeks. She broke out into a dozen exclamations of admiration and compassion. "What a wonderful tale—what a romantic situation ! No wonder poor Mr. Pickering seemed restless and unsatisfied ; no wonder he wished to put off the day of submission. And the poor little girl at Smyrna, waiting there for the young Western prince like the heroine of an Eastern tale ! She would give the world to see her photograph ; did I think Mr. Pickering would show it to her ? But never fear ; she would ask nothing indiscreet ! Yes, it was a marvellous story, and if she had invented it herself, people would have said it was absurdly improbable." She left her seat and took several turns about the room, smiling to herself and uttering little German cries of wonderment. Suddenly she stopped before the piano and broke into a little laugh ; the next moment she buried her face in the great bouquet of roses. It was time I should go, but I was indisposed to leave her without obtaining some definite assurance that, as far as pity was concerned, she pitied the young girl at Smyrna more than the young man at Homburg.

"Of course you know what I wished in telling you this," I said, rising. "She is evidently a charming creature, and the best thing he can do is to marry her. I wished to interest you in that view of it."

She had taken one of the roses from the vase and

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was arranging it in the front of her dress. Suddenly, looking up, "Leave it to me, leave it to me!" she cried. "I am interested!" And with her little blue-gemmed hand she tapped her forehead. "I am deeply interested!"

And with this I had to content myself. But more than once, the next day, I repented of my zeal, and wondered whether a providence with a white rose in her bosom might not turn out a trifle too human. In the evening, at the Kursaal, I looked for Pickering, but he was not visible, and I reflected that my revelation had not as yet, at any rate, seemed to Madame Blumenthal a reason for prescribing a cooling-term to his passion. Very late, as I was turning away, I saw him arrive—with no small satisfaction, for I had determined to let him know immediately in what way I had attempted to serve him. But he straightway passed his arm through my own and led me off towards the gardens. I saw that he was too excited to allow me to speak first.

"I have burnt my ships!" he cried, when we were out of earshot of the crowd. "I have told her everything. I have insisted that it's simple torture for me to wait, with this idle view of loving her less. It's well enough for her to ask it, but I feel strong enough now to override her reluctance. I have cast off the millstone from round my neck. I care for nothing, I know nothing, but that I love her with every pulse of my being—and that everything else has been a hideous dream, from which she may wake me into blissful morning with a single word!"

I held him off at arm's length and looked at him gravely. "You have told her, you mean, of your engagement to Miss Vernor?"

"The whole story! I have given it up—I have thrown it to the winds. I have broken utterly with the past. It may rise in its grave and give me its



curse, but it can't frighten me now. I have a right to be happy, I have a right to be free, I have a right not to bury myself alive. It was not *I* who promised—I was not born then. I myself, my soul, my mind, my option—all this is but a month old! Ah," he went on, "if you knew the difference it makes—this having chosen and broken and spoken! I **am** twice the man I was yesterday! Yesterday I **was** afraid of her; there was a kind of mocking mystery of knowledge and cleverness about her, which oppressed me in the midst of my love. But now I am afraid of nothing but of being too happy!"

I stood silent, to let him spend his eloquence. But he paused a moment, and took off his hat and fanned himself. "Let me perfectly understand," I said at last. "You have asked Madame Blumenthal to be your wife?"

"The wife of my intelligent choice!"

"And does she consent?"

"She asks three days to decide."

"Call it four! She has known your secret since this morning. I am bound to let you know I told her."

"So much the better!" cried Pickering, without apparent resentment or surprise. "It's not a brilliant offer for such a woman, and in spite of what I have at stake I feel that it would be brutal to press her."

"What does she say to your breaking your promise?" I asked in a moment.

Pickering was too much in love for false shame. "She tells me that she loves me too much to find courage to condemn me. She agrees with me that I have a right to be happy. I ask no exemption from the common law. What I claim is simply freedom to try to be!"

Of course I was puzzled; it was not in that fashion that I had expected Madame Blumenthal to make use of my information. But the matter now was

quite out of my hands, and all I could do was to bid my companion not work himself into a fever over either fortune.

The next day I had a visit from Niedermeyer, on whom, after our talk at the opera, I had left a card. We gossiped a while, and at last he said suddenly, "By the way, I have a sequel to the history of Clorinda. The major is at Homburg!"

"Indeed!" said I. "Since when?"

"These three days."

"And what is he doing?"

"He seems," said Niedermeyer with a laugh, "to be chiefly occupied in sending flowers to Madame Blumenthal. That is, I went with him the morning of his arrival to choose a nosegay, and nothing would suit him but a small haystack of white roses. I hope it was received."

"I can assure you it was," I cried. "I saw the lady fairly nestling her head in it. But I advise the major not to build upon that. He has a rival."

"Do you mean the soft young man of the other night?"

"Pickering is soft, if you will, but his softness seems to have served him. He has offered her everything, and she has not yet refused it." I had handed my visitor a cigar and he was puffing it in silence. At last he abruptly asked if I had been introduced to Madame Blumenthal, and, on my affirmative, inquired what I thought of her. "I will not tell you," I said, "or you'll call *me* soft."

He knocked away his ashes, eyeing me askance. "I have noticed your friend about," he said, "and even if you had not told me, I should have known he was in love. After he has left his adored, his face wears for the rest of the day the expression with which he has risen from her feet, and more than once I have felt like touching his elbow, as you would

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that of a man who has inadvertently come into a drawing-room in his overshoes. You say he has offered our friend everything ; but, my dear fellow, he has not everything to offer her. He evidently is as amiable as the morning, but the lady has no taste for daylight."

"I assure you Pickering is a very interesting fellow," I said.

"Ah, there it is ! Has he not some story or other ? Isn't he an orphan, or a natural child, or consumptive, or contingent heir to great estates ? She will read his little story to the end, and close the book very tenderly and smooth down the cover ; and then, when he least expects it, she will toss it into the dusty limbo of her other romances. She will let him dangle, but she will let him drop ! "

"Upon my word," I cried with heat, "if she does, she will be a very unprincipled little creature ! "

Niedermeyer shrugged his shoulders. "I never said she was a saint ! "

Shrewd as I felt Niedermeyer to be, I was not prepared to take his simple word for this event, and in the evening I received a communication which fortified my doubts. It was a note from Pickering, and it ran as follows—

MY DEAR FRIEND—I have every hope of being happy, but I am to go to Wiesbaden to learn my fate. Madame Blumenthal goes thither this afternoon to spend a few days, and she allows me to accompany her. Give me your good wishes ; you shall hear of the result.

E. P.

One of the diversions of Homburg for new-comers is to dine in rotation at the different *tables d'hôte*. It so happened that, a couple of days later, Niedermeyer took pot-luck at my hotel, and secured a seat beside my own. As we took our places I found a letter on

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my plate, and, as it was postmarked Wiesbaden, I lost no time in opening it. It contained but three lines—

I am happy—I am accepted—an hour ago. I can hardly believe it's your poor friend  
E. P.

I placed the note before Niedermeyer ; not exactly in triumph, but with the alacrity of all felicitous confutation. He looked at it much longer than was needful to read it, stroking down his beard gravely, and I felt it was not so easy to confute a pupil of the school of Metternich. At last, folding the note and handing it back, "Has your friend mentioned Madame Blumenthal's errand at Wiesbaden?" he asked.

"You look very wise. I give it up!" said I.

"She is gone there to make the major follow her. He went by the next train."

"And has the major, on his side, dropped you a line?"

"He is not a letter-writer."

"Well," said I, pocketing my letter, "with this document in my hand I am bound to reserve my judgement. We will have a bottle of Johannisberg, and drink to the triumph of virtue."

For a whole week more I heard nothing from Pickering—somewhat to my surprise, and, as the days went by, not a little to my discomposure. I had expected that his bliss would continue to overflow in brief bulletins, and his silence was possibly an indication that it had been clouded. At last I wrote to his hotel at Wiesbaden, but received no answer; whereupon, as my next resource, I repaired to his former lodging at Homburg, where I thought it possible he had left property which he would sooner or later send for. There I learned that he had indeed just telegraphed from Cologne for his luggage.

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To Cologne I immediately despatched a line of inquiry as to his prosperity and the cause of his silence. The next day I received three words in answer—a simple uncommented request that I would come to him. I lost no time, and reached him in the course of a few hours. It was dark when I arrived, and the city was sheeted in a cold autumnal rain. Pickering had stumbled, with an indifference which was itself a symptom of distress, on a certain musty old Mainzerhof, and I found him sitting over a smouldering fire in a vast dingy chamber which looked as if it had grown grey with watching the *ennui* of ten generations of travellers. Looking at him, as he rose on my entrance, I saw that he was in extreme tribulation. He was pale and haggard ; his face was five years older. Now, at least, in all conscience, he had tasted of the cup of life ! I was anxious to know what had turned it so suddenly to bitterness ; but I spared him all importunate curiosity, and let him take his time. I accepted tacitly his tacit confession of distress, and we made for a while a feeble effort to discuss the picturesqueness of Cologne. At last he rose and stood a long time looking into the fire, while I slowly paced the length of the dusky room

“ Well ! ” he said as I came back ; “ I wanted knowledge, and I certainly know something I didn’t a month ago.” And herewith, calmly and succinctly enough, as if dismay had worn itself out, he related the history of the foregoing days. He touched lightly on details ; he evidently never was to gush as freely again as he had done during the prosperity of his suit. He had been accepted one evening, as explicitly as his imagination could desire, and had gone forth in his rapture and roamed about till nearly morning in the gardens of the Conversation-house, taking the stars and the perfumes of the summer night into his

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confidence. "It is worth it all, almost," he said, "to have been wound up for an hour to that celestial pitch. No man, I am sure, can ever know it but once." The next morning he had repaired to Madame Blumenthal's lodging and had been met, to his amazement, by a naked refusal to see him. He had strode about for a couple of hours—in another mood—and then had returned to the charge. The servant handed him a three-cornered note; it contained these words: "Leave me alone to-day; I will give you ten minutes to-morrow evening." Of the next thirty-six hours he could give no coherent account, but at the appointed time Madame Blumenthal had received him. Almost before she spoke there had come to him a sense of the depth of his folly in supposing he knew her. "One has heard all one's days," he said, "of people removing the mask; it's one of the stock phrases of romance. Well, there she stood with her mask in her hand. Her face," he went on gravely, after a pause—"her face was horrible!" . . . "I give you ten minutes," she had said, pointing to the clock. "Make your scene, tear your hair, brandish your dagger!" And she had sat down and folded her arms. "It's not a joke," she cried, "it's ~~dead~~ earnest; let us have it over. You are dismissed—have you nothing to say?" He had stammered some frantic demand for an explanation; and she had risen and come near him, looking at him from head to feet, very pale, and evidently more excited than she wished him to see. "I have done with you!" she said with a smile; "you ought to have done with me! It has all been delightful, but there are excellent reasons why it should come to an end." "You have been playing a part, then," he had gasped out; "you never cared for me?" "Yes; till I knew you; till I saw how far you would go. But now the story's finished; we have reached

the *dénouement*. We will close the book and be good friends." "To see how far I would go?" he had repeated. "You led me on, meaning all the while to do *this*?" "I led you on, if you will. I received your visits, in season and out! Sometimes they were very entertaining; sometimes they bored me fearfully. But you were such a very curious case of—what shall I call it?—of sincerity, that I determined to take good and bad together. I wanted to make you commit yourself unmistakably. I should have preferred not to bring you to this place; but that too was necessary. Of course I can't marry you; I can do better. So can you, for that matter; thank your fate for it. You have thought wonders of me for a month, but your good-humour wouldn't last. I am too old and too wise; you are too young and too foolish. It seems to me that I have been very good to you; I have entertained you to the top of your bent, and, except perhaps that I am a little brusque just now, you have nothing to complain of. I would have let you down more gently if I could have taken another month to it; but circumstances have forced my hand. Abuse me, curse me, if you like. I will make every allowance!" Pickering listened to all this intently enough to perceive that, as if by some sudden natural cataclysm, the ground had broken away at his feet, and that he must recoil. He turned away in dumb amazement. "I don't know how I seemed to be taking it," he said, "but she seemed really to desire—I don't know why—something in the way of reproach and vituperation. But I couldn't, in that way, have uttered a syllable. I was sickened; I wanted to get away into the air—to shake her off and come to my senses. 'Have you nothing, nothing, nothing to say?' she cried, as if she were disappointed, while I stood with my hand on the door. 'Haven't I treated you to talk enough?'

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I believe I answered. 'You will write to me then, when you get home?' 'I think not,' said I. 'Six months hence, I fancy, you will come and see me!' 'Never!' said I. 'That's a confession of stupidity,' she answered. 'It means that, even on reflexion, you will never understand the philosophy of my conduct.' The word 'philosophy' seemed so strange that I verily believe I smiled. 'I have given you all that you gave me,' she went on. 'Your passion was an affair of the head.' 'I only wish you had told me sooner that you considered it so!' I exclaimed. And I went my way. The next day I came down the Rhine. I sat all day on the boat, not knowing where I was going, where to get off. I was in a kind of ague of terror; it seemed to me I had seen something infernal. At last I saw the cathedral towers here looming over the city. They seemed to say something to me, and when the boat stopped, I came ashore. I have been here a week. I have not slept at night—and yet it has been a week of rest!"

It seemed to me that he was in a fair way to recover, and that his own philosophy, if left to take its time, was adequate to the occasion. After his story was once told I referred to his grievance but once—that evening, later, as we were about to separate for the night. "Suffer me to say that there was some truth in *her* account of your relations," I said. "You were using her intellectually, and all the while, without your knowing it, she was using you. It was diamond cut diamond. Her needs were the more superficial and she got tired of the game first." He frowned and turned uneasily away, but without contradicting me. I waited a few moments, to see if he would remember, before we parted, that he had a claim to make upon me. But he seemed to have forgotten it.



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The next day we strolled about the picturesque old city, and of course, before long, went into the cathedral. Pickering said little; he seemed intent upon his own thoughts. He sat down beside a pillar near a chapel, in front of a gorgeous window, and, leaving him to his meditations, I wandered through the church. When I came back I saw he had something to say. But before he had spoken I laid my hand on his shoulder and looked at him with a significant smile. He slowly bent his head and dropped his eyes, with a mixture of assent and humility. I drew forth from where it had lain untouched for a month the letter he had given me to keep, placed it silently on his knee, and left him to deal with it alone.

Half an hour later I returned to the same place, but he had gone, and one of the sacristans, hovering about and seeing me looking for Pickering, said he thought he had left the church. I found him in his gloomy chamber at the inn, pacing slowly up and down. I should doubtless have been at a loss to say just what effect I expected the letter from Smyrna to produce; but his actual aspect surprised me. He was flushed, excited, a trifle irritated.

"Evidently," I said, "you have read your letter."

"It is proper I should tell you what is in it," he answered. "When I gave it to you a month ago, I did my friends injustice."

"You called it a 'summons,' I remember."

"I was a great fool! It's a release!"

"From your engagement?"

"From everything! The letter, of course, is from Mr. Vernor. He desires to let me know at the earliest moment that his daughter, informed for the first time a week before of what had been expected of her, positively refuses to be bound by the contract or to assent to my being bound. She had been given

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a week to reflect and had spent it in inconsolable tears. She had resisted every form of persuasion ; from compulsion, writes Mr. Vernor, he naturally shrinks. The young lady considers the arrangement 'horrible.' After accepting her duties cut and dried all her life, she pretends at last to have a taste of her own. I confess I am surprised ; I had been given to believe that she was stupidly submissive and would remain so to the end of the chapter. Not a bit of it. She has insisted on my being formally dismissed, and her father intimates that in case of non-compliance she threatens him with an attack of brain-fever. Mr. Vernor condoles with me handsomely, and lets me know that the young lady's attitude has been a great shock to his nerves. He adds that he will not aggravate such regret as I may do him the honour to entertain, by any allusions to his daughter's charms and to the magnitude of my loss, and he concludes with the hope that, for the comfort of all concerned, I may already have amused my fancy with other 'views.' He reminds me in a postscript that, in spite of this painful occurrence, the son of his most valued friend will always be a welcome visitor at his house. I am free, he observes ; I have my life before me ; he recommends an extensive course of travel. Should my wanderings lead me to the East, he hopes that no false embarrassment will deter me from presenting myself at Smyrna. He can promise me at least a friendly reception. It's a very polite letter."

Polite as the letter was, Pickering seemed to find no great exhilaration in having this famous burden so handsomely lifted from his spirit. He began to brood over his liberation in a manner which you might have deemed proper to a renewed sense of bondage. "Bad news," he had called his letter originally ; and yet, now that its contents proved

to be in flat contradiction to his foreboding, there was no impulsive voice to reverse the formula and declare the news was good. The wings of impulse in the poor fellow had of late been terribly clipped. It was an obvious reflexion, of course, that if he had not been so stiffly certain of the matter a month before, and had gone through the form of breaking Mr. Vernor's seal, he might have escaped the purgatory of Madame Blumenthal's sub-acid blandishments. But I left him to moralise in private ; I had no desire, as the phrase is, to rub it in. My thoughts, moreover, were following another train ; I was saying to myself that if to those gentle graces of which her young visage had offered to my fancy the blooming promise, Miss Vernor added in this striking measure the capacity for magnanimous action, the amendment to my friend's career had been less happy than the rough draught. Presently, turning about, I saw him looking at the young lady's photograph. " Of course, now," he said, " I have no right to keep it ! " And before I could ask for another glimpse of it, he had thrust it into the fire.

" I am sorry to be saying it just now," I observed after a while, " but I shouldn't wonder if Miss Vernor were a charming creature."

" Go and find out," he answered gloomily. " The coast is clear. My part is to forget her," he presently added. " It ought not to be hard. But don't you think," he went on suddenly, " that for a poor fellow who asked nothing of fortune but leave to sit down in a quiet corner, it has been rather a cruel pushing about ? "

Cruel indeed, I declared, and he certainly had the right to demand a clean page on the book of fate, and a fresh start. Mr. Vernor's advice was sound ; he should amuse himself with a long journey. If it would be any comfort to him, I would go with

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him on his way. Pickering assented without enthusiasm ; he had the embarrassed look of a man who, having gone to some cost to make a good appearance in a drawing-room, should find the door suddenly slammed in his face. We started on our journey, however, and little by little his enthusiasm returned. He was too capable of enjoying fine things to remain permanently irresponsive, and after a fortnight spent among pictures and monuments and antiquities, I felt that I was seeing him for the first time in his best and healthiest mood. He had had a fever and then he had had a chill ; the pendulum had swung right and left in a manner rather trying to the machine ; but now, at last, it was working back to an even, natural beat. He recovered in a measure the generous eloquence with which he had fanned his flame at Homburg, and talked about things with something of the same passionate freshness. One day when I was laid up at the inn at Bruges with a lame foot, he came home and treated me to a rhapsody about a certain meek-faced virgin of Hans Memling, which seemed to me sounder sense than his compliments to Madame Blumenthal. He had his dull days and his sombre moods—hours of irresistible retrospect ; but I let them come and go without remonstrance, because I fancied they always left him a trifle more alert and resolute. One evening, however, he sat hanging his head in so doleful a fashion that I took the bull by the horns and told him he had by this time surely paid his debt to penitence, and that he owed it to himself to banish that woman for ever from his thoughts.

He looked up, staring ; and then with a deep blush—"That woman ?" he said. "I was not thinking of Madame Blumenthal !"

After this I gave another construction to his melancholy. Taking him with his hopes and fears,

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at the end of six weeks of active observation and keen sensation, Pickering was as fine a fellow as need be. We made our way down to Italy and spent a fortnight at Venice. There something happened which I had been confidently expecting ; I had said to myself that it was merely a question of time. We had passed the day at Torcello, and came floating back in the glow of the sunset, with measured oar-strokes. " I am well on the way," Pickering said ; " I think I will go ! "

We had not spoken for an hour, and I naturally asked him, Where ? His answer was delayed by our getting into the Piazzetta. I stepped ashore first and then turned to help him. As he took my hand, he met my eyes, consciously, and it came. " To Smyrna ! "

A couple of days later he started. I had risked the conjecture that Miss Vernor was a charming creature, and six months afterwards he wrote me that I was right.



**BENVOLIO**





## I

ONCE upon a time (as if he had lived in a fairy-tale) there was a very interesting young man. This is not a fairy-tale, and yet our young man was in some respects as pretty a fellow as any fairy prince. I call him interesting, because his type of character is one I have always found it profitable to observe. If you fail to consider him so, I shall be willing to confess that the fault is mine and not his ; I shall have told my story with too little skill.

His name was Benvolio ; that is, it was not ; but we shall call him so for the sake both of convenience and of picturesqueness. He was about to enter upon the third decade of our mortal span ; he had a little property, and he followed no regular profession. His personal appearance was in the highest degree prepossessing. Having said this, it were perhaps well that I should let you—you especially, madam—suppose that he exactly corresponded to your ideal of manly beauty ; but I am bound to explain definitely wherein it was that he resembled a fairy prince, and I need furthermore to make a record of certain little peculiarities and anomalies in which it is probable that your brilliant conception would be deficient. Benvolio was slim and fair, with clustering locks, remarkably fine eyes, and such a frank, expressive smile that on the journey through life it was almost as serviceable to its owner as the magic key, or the

enchanted ring, or the wishing-cap, or any other bauble of necromantic properties. Unfortunately this charming smile was not always at his command, and its place was sometimes occupied by a very perverse and dusky frown, which rendered the young man no service whatever—not even that of frightening people; for though it expressed extreme irritation and impatience, it was characterised by the brevity of contempt, and the only revenge upon disagreeable things and offensive people that it seemed to express a desire for on Benvolio's part was that of forgetting and ignoring them with the utmost possible celerity. It never made any one tremble, though now and then it perhaps made irritable people murmur an imprecation or two. You might have supposed from Benvolio's manner, when he was in good humour (which ~~was~~ was the greater part of the time), from his brilliant, intelligent glance, from his easy, irresponsible step, and in especial from the sweet, clear, lingering, caressing tone of his voice—the voice as it were of a man whose fortune ~~has~~ been made for him, and who assumes, ~~a~~ ~~trifle~~ ~~egotistically~~, that the rest of the world is equally at leisure to share with him the sweets of life, to pluck the wayside flowers, and chase the butterflies afield—you might have supposed, I say, from all this luxurious assurance of demeanour, that our hero really had the wishing-cap sitting invisible on his handsome brow, or was obliged only to close his knuckles together a moment to exert an effective pressure upon the magic ring. The young man, I have said, was a mixture of inconsistencies; I may say more exactly that he was a tissue of contradictions. ~~He~~ He did possess the magic ring, in a certain fashion; he possessed, in other words, the poetic imagination. Everything that fancy could do for him was done in perfection. It gave him immense satisfactions; it transfigured the world; it made very

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common objects sometimes seem 'radiantly beautiful, and it converted beautiful ones into infinite sources of intoxication. Benvolio had what is called the poetic temperament. It is rather out of fashion to describe a man in these terms ; but I believe, in spite of much evidence to the contrary, that there are poets still ; and if we may call a spade a spade, why should we not call such a person as Benvolio a poet ?

These contradictions that I speak of ran through his whole nature, and they were perfectly apparent in his habits, in his manners, in his conversation, and even in his physiognomy. It was as if the souls of two very different men had been placed together to make the voyage of life in the same boat, and had agreed for convenience' sake to take the helm in alternation. The helm, with Benvolio, was always the imagination ; but in his different moods it worked very differently. To an acute observer his face itself would have betrayed these variations ; and it is certain that his dress, his talk, his way of spending his time, ~~late~~ day and another, abundantly indicated them. Sometimes he looked very young—rosy, radiant, blooming, younger than his years. Then suddenly, as the light struck his head in a particular manner, you would see that his golden locks contained a surprising number of silver threads ; and with your attention quickened by this discovery, you would proceed to detect something grave and discreet in his smile—something vague and ghostly, like the dim adumbration of the darker half of the lunar disk. You might have met Benvolio, in certain states of mind, dressed like a man of the highest fashion—wearing his hat on his ear, a rose in his button-hole, a wonderful intaglio or an antique Syracusan coin, by way of a pin, in his cravat. Then, on the morrow, you would have espied him braving the sunshine in a rusty scholar's coat, with his hat pulled over his

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brow—a costume wholly at odds with flowers and gems. It was all a matter of fancy; but his fancy was a weather-cock, and faced east or west as the wind blew. His conversation matched his coat and breeches; he talked one day the talk of the town; he chattered, he gossiped, he asked questions and told stories; you would have said that he was a charming fellow for a dinner-party or the pauses of a cotillon. The next he either talked philosophy or politics, or said nothing at all; he was absent and indifferent; he was thinking his own thoughts; he had a book in his pocket, and evidently he was composing one in his head. At home he lived in two chambers. One was an immense room, hung with pictures, lined with books, draped with rugs and tapestries, decorated with a multitude of ingenious devices (for of all these things he was very fond); the other, his sleeping-room, was almost as bare as a monastic cell. It had a meagre little strip of carpet on the floor, and a dozen well-thumbed volumes of classic poets and sages on the mantelshelf. On the wall hung three or four coarsely-engraved portraits of the most exemplary of these worthies; these were the only ornaments. But the room had the charm of a great window, in a deep embrasure, looking out upon a tangled, silent, moss-grown garden, and in the embrasure stood the little ink-blotted table at which Benvolio did most of his poetic scribbling. The windows of his sumptuous sitting-room commanded a wide public square, where people were always passing and lounging, where military music used to play on vernal nights, and half the life of the great town went forward. At the risk of your thinking our hero a sad idler, I will say that he spent an inordinate amount of time in gazing out of these windows (in either direction) with his elbows on the sill. The garden did not belong to the house which

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he inhabited, but to a neighboring one, and the proprietor, a graceless old miser, was very chary of permits to visit his domain. But Benvolio's fancy used to wander through the alleys without stirring the long arms of the untended plants, and to bend over the heavy-headed flowers without leaving a footprint on their beds. It was here that his happiest thoughts came to him—that inspiration (as we may say, speaking of a man of the poetic temperament) descended upon him in silence, and for certain divine, appreciable moments stood poised along the course of his scratching quill. It was not, however, that he had not spent some very charming hours in the larger, richer apartment. He used to receive his friends there—sometimes in great numbers, sometimes at boisterous, many-voiced suppers, which lasted far into the night. When these entertainments were over he never made a direct transition to his little scholar's cell. He went out and wandered for an hour through the dark, sleeping streets of the town, ridding himself of the fumes of wine, and feeling not at all tipsy, but intensely, portentously sober. More than once, when he had come back and prepared to go to bed, he saw the first faint glow of dawn trembling upward over the tree-tops of his garden. His friends, coming to see him, often found the greater room empty, and advancing, rapped at the door of his chamber. But he frequently kept quiet, not desiring in the least to see them, knowing exactly what they were going to say, and not thinking it worth hearing. Then, hearing them stride away, and the outer door close behind them, he would come forth and take a turn in his slippers, over his Persian carpets, and glance out of the window and see his defeated visitant stand scratching his chin in the sunny square. After this he would laugh lightly to himself—as is said to be

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the habit of the scribbling tribe in moments of production.

Although he had many relatives he enjoyed extreme liberty. His family was so large, his brothers and sisters were so numerous, that he could absent himself and be little missed. Sometimes he used this privilege freely ; he tired of people whom he had seen very often, and he had seen, of course, a great deal of his family. At other moments he was extremely domestic ; he suddenly found solitude depressing, and it seemed to him that if one sought society as a refuge, one needed to be on familiar terms with it, and that with no one was familiarity so natural as among people who had grown up at a common fireside. Nevertheless it frequently occurred to him—for sooner or later everything occurred to him—that he was too independent and irresponsible ; that he would be happier if he had a little golden ball and chain tied to his ankle. His curiosity about all things—life and love and art and truth—was great, and his theory was to satisfy it as freely as might be ; but as the years went by this pursuit of impartial science appeared to produce a singular result. He became conscious of an intellectual condition similar to that of a palate which has lost its relish. To a man with a disordered appetite all things taste alike, and so it seemed to Benvolio that the gustatory faculty of his mind was losing its keenness. It had still its savoury moments, its feasts and its holidays ; but, on the whole, the spectacle of human life was growing flat and stale. This is simply a wordy way of expressing that comprehensive fact—Benvolio was *blasé*. He knew it, he knew it betimes, and he regretted it acutely. He believed that the mind can keep its freshness to the last, and that it is only fools that are overbored. There was a way of never being bored, and the wise man's duty was to find it out.

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One of its rudiments, he believed, was that one grows tired of one's self sooner than of anything else in the world. Idleness, every one admitted, was the greatest of follies ; but idleness was subtle, and exacted tribute under a hundred plausible disguises. One was often idle when one seemed to be ardently occupied ; one was always idle when one's occupation had not a high aim. One was idle therefore when one was working simply for one's self. Curiosity for curiosity's sake, art for art's sake, these were essentially broken-winded steeds. Ennui was at the end of everything that did not multiply our relations with life. To multiply his relations, therefore, Benvolio reflected, should be the wise man's aim. Poor Benvolio had to reflect on this, because, as I say, he was a poet and not a man of action. A fine fellow of the latter stamp would have solved the problem without knowing it, and bequeathed to his fellow-men not frigid formulas but vivid examples. But Benvolio had often said to himself that he was born to imagine great things—not to do them ; and he had said this by no means sadly, for on the whole he was very well content with his portion. Imagine them he determined he would, and on a magnificent scale. He would multiply his labours at least, and they should be very serious ones. He would cultivate great ideas, he would enunciate great truths, he would write immortal verses. In all this there was a large amount of talent and a liberal share of ambition. I will not say that Benvolio was a man of genius ; it may seem to make the distinction too cheap ; but he was at any rate a man with an intellectual passion ; and if, being near him, you had been able to listen intently enough, he would, like the great people of his craft, have seemed to emit something of that vague magical murmur—the voice of the infinite—which lurks in the involutions of a sea-shell. He himself, by the

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way, had once made use of this little simile, and had written a poem in which it was melodiously set forth that the poetic minds scattered about the world correspond to the little shells one picks up on the beach, all resonant with the echo of ocean. The whole thing was of course rounded off with the sands of time, the waves of history, and other harmonious conceits.



## II

BUT (as you are naturally expecting to hear) Benvolio knew perfectly well that there is one relation with life which is a better antidote to ennui than any other—the relation established with a charming woman. Benvolio was of course in love. Who was his mistress, you ask (I flatter myself with some impatience), and was she pretty, was she kind, was he successful? Hereby hangs my tale, which I must relate in due form.

Benvolio's mistress was a lady whom (as I cannot tell you her real name) it will be quite in keeping to speak of as the Countess. The Countess was a young widow, who had some time since divested herself of her mourning weeds—which indeed she had never worn but very lightly. She was rich, extremely pretty, and free to do as she listed. She was passionately fond of pleasure and admiration, and they gushed forth at her feet in unceasing streams. Her beauty was not of the conventional type, but it was dazzlingly brilliant; few faces were more expressive, more fascinating. Hers was never the same for two days together; it reflected her momentary circumstances with extraordinary vividness, and in knowing her you had the advantage of knowing a dozen different women. She was clever and accomplished, and had the credit of being perfectly amiable; indeed it was difficult to imagine a person combining a greater number of the precious

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"gifts of nature and fortune. She represented felicity, gaiety, success ; she was made to charm, to play a part, to exert a sway. She lived in a great house, behind high verdure-muffled walls, where other Countesses, in other years, had played a part no less brilliant. It was an antiquated quarter, into which the tide of commerce had lately begun to roll heavily ; but the turbid wave of trade broke in vain against the Countess's enclosure, and if in her garden and her drawing-room you heard the deep uproar of the city, it was only as a vague undertone to sweeter things—to music, and witty talk, and tender colloquy. There was something very striking in this little oasis of luxury and privacy, in the midst of common toil and traffic.

Benvolio was a great deal at this lady's house ; he rarely desired better entertainment. I spoke just now of privacy ; but privacy was not what he found there, nor what he wished to find. He went there when he wished to learn with the least trouble what was going on in the world ; for the talk of the people the Countess generally had about her was an epitome of the gossip, the rumours, the interests, the hopes and fears, of polite society. She was a thoroughly liberal hostess ; all she asked was to be entertained ; if you would contribute to the common fund of amusement, of discussion, you were a welcome guest. Sooner or later, among your fellow-guests, you encountered every one of consequence. There were frivolous people and wise people ; people whose fortune was in their pockets and people whose fortune was in their brains ; people deeply concerned in public affairs and people concerned only with the fit of their garments or with the effect upon the company of the announcement of their names. Benvolio, with his taste for a large and various social spectacle, appreciated all this ; but he was best pleased, as a general thing, when he

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found the Countess alone. This was often his fortune, for the simple reason that when the Countess expected him she invariably caused herself to be refused to every one else. This is almost an answer to your inquiry whether Benvolio was successful in his suit. As yet, strictly speaking, there was no suit ; Benvolio had never made love to the Countess. This sounds very strange, but it is nevertheless true. He was in love with her ; he thought her the most charming creature conceivable ; he spent hours with her alone by her own orders ; he had had opportunity—he had been up to his neck in opportunity—and yet he had never said to her, as would have seemed so natural, “ Dear Countess, I beseech you to be my wife.” If you are surprised, I may also confide to you that the Countess was ; and surprise under the circumstances very easily became displeasure. It is by no means certain that if Benvolio had made the little speech we have just imagined, the Countess would have fallen into his arms, confessed to an answering flame, and rung in *finis* to our tale, with the wedding-bells. But she nevertheless expected him in civility to pay her this supreme compliment. Her answer would be—what it might be ; but his silence was a permanent offence. Every man, roughly speaking, had asked the Countess to marry him, and every man had been told that she was much obliged, but had not been thinking of changing her condition. But here, with the one man who failed to ask her, she was perpetually thinking of it, and this negative quality in Benvolio was more present to her mind, gave her more to think about, than all the positiveness of her other suitors. The truth was she liked Benvolio extremely, and his independence rendered him excellent service. The Countess had a very lively fancy, and she had fingered, nimbly enough, the volume of the young man's merits. She was by nature a trifle

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cold ; she rarely lost her head ; she measured each step as she took it ; she had had little fancies and incipient passions ; but on the whole she had thought much more about love than felt it. She had often tried to form an image of the sort of man it would be well for her to love—for so it was she expressed it. She had succeeded but indifferently, and her imagination had never found a pair of wings until the day she met Benvolio. Then it seemed to her that her quest was ended—her prize gained. This nervous, ardent, deep-eyed youth struck her as the harmonious counterpart of her own facile personality. This conviction rested with the Countess on a fine sense of propriety which it would be vain to attempt to analyse ; he was different from herself and from the other men who surrounded her, and she valued him as a specimen of a rare and distinguished type. In the old days she would have appointed him to be her minstrel or her jester—it is to be feared that poor Benvolio would have figured rather dismally in the latter capacity ; and at present a woman who was in her own right a considerable social figure, might give such a man a place in her train as an illustrious husband. I don't know how good a judge the Countess was of such matters, but she believed that the world would hear of Benvolio. She had beauty, ancestry, money, luxury, but she had not genius ; and if genius was to be had, why not secure it, and complete the list ? This is doubtless a rather coarse statement of the Countess's argument ; but you have it thrown in gratis, as it were ; for all I am bound to tell you is that this charming young woman took a fancy to this clever young man, and that she used to cry sometimes for a quarter of a minute when she imagined he was indifferent to her. Her tears were wasted, because he really cared for her—more even than she would have imagined if she had taken a favourable view of

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the case. But Benvolio, I cannot too much repeat, was an exceedingly complex character, and there was many a lapse in the logic of his conduct. The Countess charmed him, excited him, interested him ; he did her abundant justice—more than justice ; but at the end of all he felt that she failed to satisfy him. If a man could have half-a-dozen wives—and Benvolio had once maintained, poetically, that he ought to have—the Countess would do very well for one of them—possibly even for the best of them. But she would not serve for all seasons and all moods ; she needed a complement, an alternative—what the French call a *reponsoir*. One day he was going to see her, knowing that he was expected. There was to be a number of other people—in fact, a very brilliant assembly ; but Benvolio knew that a certain touch of the hand, a certain glance of the eye, a certain caress of the voice, would be reserved for him alone. Happy Benvolio, you will say, to be going about the world with such charming secrets as this locked up in his young heart ! Happy Benvolio indeed ; but mark how he trifled with his happiness. He went to the Countess's gate, but he went no further ; he stopped, stood there a moment, frowning intensely, and biting the finger of his glove ; then suddenly he turned and strode away in the opposite direction. He walked and walked and left the town behind him. He went his way till he reached the country, and here he bent his steps toward a little wood which he knew very well, and whither indeed, on a spring afternoon, when she had taken a fancy to play at shepherd and shepherdess, he had once come with the Countess. He flung himself on the grass, on the edge of the wood—not in the same place where he had lain at the Countess's feet, pulling sonnets out of his pocket and reading them one by one ; a little stream flowed beside him ; opposite, the sun

was declining ; the distant city lay before him, lifting its towers and chimneys against the reddening western sky. The twilight fell and deepened and the stars came out. Benvolio lay there thinking that he preferred them to the Countess's wax candles. He went back to town in a farmer's wagon, talking with the honest rustic who drove it.

Very much in this way, when he had been on the point of knocking at the gate of the Countess's heart and asking ardently to be admitted, he had paused, stood frowning, and then turned short and rambled away into solitude. She never knew how near, two or three times, he had come. Two or three times she had accused him of being rude, and this was nothing but the backward swing of the pendulum. One day it seemed to her that he was altogether too vexatious, and she reproached herself with her good-nature. She had made herself too cheap ; such conduct was beneath her dignity ; she would take another tone. She closed her door to him, and bade her people say, whenever he came, that she was engaged. At first Benvolio only wondered. Oddly enough, he was not what is commonly called sensitive ; he never supposed you meant to offend him ; not being at all impertinent himself, he was not on the watch for impertinence in others. Only, when he fairly caught you in the act he was immensely disgusted. Therefore, as I say, he simply wondered what had suddenly made the Countess so busy ; then he remembered certain other charming persons whom he knew, and went to see how the world wagged with them. But they rendered the Countess eminent service ; she gained by comparison, and Benvolio began to miss her. All that other charming women were who led the life of the world (as it is called) the Countess was in a superior, in a perfect degree ; she was the ripest fruit of a high civilisation ; her companions and rivals,

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beside her, had but a pallid bloom, an acrid savour. Benvolio had a relish in all things for the best, and he found himself breathing sighs under the Countess's darkened windows. He wrote to her, asking why in the world she treated him so cruelly, and then she knew that her charm was working. She was careful not to answer his letter, and to see that he was refused at her gate as inexorably as ever. It is an ill wind that blows nobody good, and Benvolio, one night after his dismissal, wandered about the moonlit streets till nearly morning, composing the finest verses he had ever produced. The subscribers to the magazine to which he sent them were at least the gainers. But unlike many poets, Benvolio did not on this occasion bury his passion in his poem ; or if he did, its ghost was stalking abroad the very next night. He went again to the Countess's gate, and again it was closed in his face. So, after a very moderate amount of hesitation, he bravely (and with a dexterity which surprised him) scaled her garden wall and dropped down in the moonshine, upon her lawn. I don't know whether she was expecting him, but if she had been, the matter could not have been better arranged. She was sitting in a little niche of shrubbery, with no protector but a microscopic lap-dog. She pretended to be scandalised at his audacity, but his audacity carried the hour. " This time certainly," thought the Countess, " he will make his declaration. He didn't jump that wall, at the risk of his neck, simply to ask me for a cup of tea." Not a bit of it ; Benvolio was devoted, but he was not more explicit than before. He declared that this was the happiest hour of his life ; that there was a charming air of romance in his position ; that, honestly, he thanked the Countess for having made him desperate ; that he would never come to see her again but by the garden-wall ; that something, to-night—what was it ?—was

vastly becoming to her ; that he devoutly hoped she would receive no one else ; that his admiration for her was unbounded ; that the stars, finally, had a curious pink light ! He looked at her, through the flower-scented dusk, with admiring eyes ; but he looked at the stars as well ; he threw back his head and folded his arms, and let the conversation flag while he examined the firmament. He observed also the long shafts of light proceeding from the windows of the house, as they fell upon the lawn and played among the shrubbery. The Countess had always thought him a singular man, but to-night she thought him more singular than ever. She became satirical, and the point of her satire was that he was after all but a dull fellow ; that his admiration was a poor compliment ; that he would do well to turn his attention to astronomy ! In answer to this he came perhaps (to the Countess's sense) as near as he had ever come to making a declaration.

" Dear lady," he said, " you don't begin to know how much I admire you ! "

She left her place at this, and walked about her lawn, looking at him askance while he talked, trailing her embroidered robe over the grass and fingering the folded petals of her flowers. He made a sort of sentimental profession of faith ; he assured her that she represented his ideal of a certain sort of woman. This last phrase made her pause a moment and stare at him wide-eyed. " Oh, I mean the finest sort," he cried—" the sort that exerts the widest sway ! You represent the world and everything that the world can give, and you represent them at their best—in their most generous, most graceful, most inspiring form. If a man were a revolutionist, you would reconcile him to society. You are a divine embodiment of all the amenities, the refinements, the complexities of life ! You are the flower of urbanity, of



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culture, of tradition ! You are the product of so many influences that it widens one's horizon to know you ; of you too it is true that to admire you is a liberal education ! Your charm is irresistible ; I assure you I don't resist it ! ”

Compliments agreed with the Countess, as we may say ; they not only made her happier, but they made her better. It became a matter of conscience with her to deserve them. These were magnificent ones, and she was by no means indifferent to them. Her cheek faintly flushed, her eyes vaguely glowed, and though her beauty, in the literal sense, was questionable, all that Benvolio said of her had never seemed more true. He said more in the same strain, and she listened without interrupting him. But at last she suddenly became impatient ; it seemed to her that this was after all a tolerably inexpensive sort of wooing. But she did not betray her impatience with any petulance ; she simply shook her finger a moment to enjoin silence, and then she said, in a voice of extreme gentleness—“ You have too much imagination ! ” He answered that, to do her perfect justice, he had too little. To this she replied that it was not of her any longer he was talking ; he had left her far behind. He was spinning fancies about some highly subtilised figment of his brain. The best answer to this, it seemed to Benvolio, was to seize her hand and kiss it. I don't know what the Countess thought of this form of argument ; I incline to think it both pleased and vexed her ; it was at once too much and too little. She snatched her hand away and went rapidly into the house. Although Benvolio immediately followed her, he was unable to overtake her ; she had retired into impenetrable seclusion. A short time afterwards she left town and went for the summer to an estate which she possessed in a distant part of the country.

### III

BENVOLIO was extremely fond of the country, but he remained in town after all his friends had departed. Many of them made him promise that he would come and see them. He promised, or half promised, but when he reflected that in almost every case he would find a house full of fellow-guests, to whose pursuits he would have to conform, and that if he rambled away with a valued duodecimo in his pocket to spend the morning alone in the woods, he would be denounced as a marplot and a selfish brute, he felt no great desire to pay visits. He had, as we know, his moods of expansion and of contraction ; he had been tolerably inflated for many months past, and now he had begun to take in sail. And then I suspect the foolish fellow had no money to travel withal. He had lately put all his available funds into the purchase of a picture—an estimable work of the Venetian school, which had been suddenly thrown into the market. It was offered for a moderate sum, and Benvolio, who was one of the first to see it, secured it, and hung it triumphantly in his room. It had all the classic Venetian glow, and he used to lie on his divan by the hour, gazing at it. It had, indeed, a peculiar property, of which I have known no other example. Most pictures that are remarkable for their colour (especially if they have been painted for a couple of centuries) need a

flood of sunshine on the canvas to bring it out. But this remarkable work seemed to have a hidden radiance of its own, which showed brightest when the room was half darkened. When Benvolio wished especially to enjoy his treasure he dropped his Venetian blinds, and the picture bloomed out into the cool dusk with enchanting effect. It represented, in a fantastic way, the story of Perseus and Andromeda—the beautiful naked maiden chained to a rock, on which, with picturesque incongruity, a wild fig-tree was growing; the green Adriatic tumbling at her feet, and a splendid brown-limbed youth in a curious helmet hovering near her on a winged horse. The journey his fancy made as he lay and looked at his picture Benvolio preferred to any journey he might make by the public conveyances.

But he resorted for entertainment, as he had often done before, to the windows overlooking the old garden behind his house. As the summer deepened, of course the charm of the garden increased. It grew more tangled and bosky and mossy, and sent forth sweeter and heavier odours into the neighbouring air. It was a perfect solitude; Benvolio had never seen a visitor there. One day, therefore, at this time, it puzzled him most agreeably to perceive a young girl sitting under one of the trees. She sat there a long time, and though she was at a distance, he managed, by looking long enough, to make out that she was pretty. She was dressed in black, and when she left her place her step had a kind of nun-like gentleness and demureness. Although she was alone, there was something timid and tentative in her movements. She wandered away and disappeared from sight, save that here and there he saw her white parasol gleaming in the gaps of the foliage. Then she came back to her seat under the great tree, and remained there for some time, arranging in her lap certain flowers that

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she had gathered. Then she rose again and vanished, and Benvolio waited in vain for her return. She had evidently gone into the house. The next day he saw her again, and the next, and the next. On these occasions she had a book in her hand, and she sat in her former place a long time, and read it with an air of great attention. Now and then she raised her head and glanced toward the house, as if to keep something in sight which divided her care ; and once or twice she laid down her book and tripped away to her hidden duties with a lighter step than she had shown the first day. Benvolio formed a theory that she had an invalid parent, or a relation of some kind, who was unable to walk, and had been moved into a window overlooking the garden. She always took up her book again when she came back, and bent her pretty head over it with charming earnestness. Benvolio had already discovered that her head was pretty. He fancied it resembled a certain exquisite little head on a Greek silver coin which lay, with several others, in an agate cup on his table. You see he had also already taken to fancying, and I offer this as the excuse for his staring at his modest neighbour by the hour. But he was not during these hours idle, because he was—I can't say falling in love with her ; he knew her too little for that,\* and besides, he was in love with the Countess—but because he was at any rate cudgelling his brains about her. Who was she ? what was she ? why had he never seen her before ? The house in which she apparently lived was in another street from Benvolio's own, but he went out of his way on purpose to look at it. It was an ancient, grizzled, sad-faced structure, with grated windows on the ground floor ; it looked like a convent or a "prison. Over a wall, beside it, there tumbled into the street some stray tendrils of a wild creeper from Benvolio's garden. Suddenly Benvolio began to suspect that

the book the young girl in the garden was reading was none other than a volume of his own, put forth some six months before. His volume had a white cover, and so had this ; white covers are rather rare, and there was nothing impossible either in this young lady's reading his book or in her finding it interesting. Very many other women had done the same. Benvolio's neighbour had a pencil in her pocket, which she every now and then drew forth, to make with it a little mark on her page. This quiet gesture gave the young man an exquisite pleasure.

I am ashamed to say how much time he spent, for a week, at his window. Every day the young girl came into the garden. At last there occurred a rainy day—a long, warm summer's rain—and she stayed within doors. He missed her quite acutely, and wondered, half-smiling, half-frowning, that her absence should make such a difference for him. He actually depended upon her. He was ignorant of her name ; he knew neither the colour of her eyes, nor the shade of her hair, nor the sound of her voice ; it was very likely that if he were to meet her face to face, elsewhere, he would not recognise her. But she interested him ; he liked her ; he found her little indefinite, black-dressed figure sympathetic. He used to find the Countess sympathetic, and certainly the Countess was as unlike this quiet garden-nymph as she could very well be and be yet a charming woman. Benvolio's sympathies, as we know, were large. After the rain the young girl came out again, and now she had another book, having apparently finished Benvolio's. He was gratified to observe that she bestowed upon this one a much more wandering attention. Sometimes she let it drop listlessly at her side, and seemed to lose herself in maidenly reverie. Was she thinking how much more beautiful Benvolio's verses were than others of the day? Was she

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perhaps repeating them to herself? It charmed Benvolio to suppose she might be; for he was not spoiled in this respect. The Countess knew none of his poetry by heart; she was nothing of a reader. She had his book on her table, but he once noticed that half the leaves were uncut.

After a couple of days of sunshine the rain came back again, to our hero's infinite annoyance, and this time it lasted several days. The garden lay dripping and desolate; its charm had quite departed. These days passed gloomily for Benvolio; he decided that rainy weather, in summer, in town, was intolerable. He began to think of the Countess again—he was sure that over her broad lands the summer sun was shining. He saw them, in envious fancy, studded with joyous Watteau-groups, feasting and making music under the shade of ancestral beeches. What a charming life! he thought—what brilliant, enchanted, memorable days! He had said the very reverse of all this, as you remember, three weeks before. I don't know that he had ever devoted a formula to the idea that men of imagination are not bound to be consistent, but he certainly conformed to its spirit. We are not, however, by any means at the end of his inconsistencies. He immediately wrote a letter to the Countess, asking her if he might pay her a visit.

Shortly after he had sent his letter the weather mended, and he went out for a walk. The sun was near setting; the streets were all ruddy and golden with its light, and the scattered rain-clouds, broken into a thousand little particles, were flecking the sky like a shower of opals and amethysts. Benvolio stopped, as he sauntered along, to gossip a while with his friend the bookseller. The bookseller was a foreigner and a man of taste; his shop was in the arcade of the great square. When Benvolio

went in he was serving a lady, and the lady was dressed in black. Benvolio just now found it natural to notice a lady who was dressed in black, and the fact that this lady's face was averted made observation at once more easy and more fruitless. But at last her errand was finished ; she had been ordering several books, and the bookseller was writing down their names. Then she turned round, and Benvolio saw her face. He stood staring at her most inconsiderately, for he felt an immediate certainty that she was the bookish damsel of the garden. She gave a glance round the shop, at the books on the walls, at the prints and busts, the apparatus of learning, in various forms, that it contained, and then, with the soundless, half-furtive step which Benvolio now knew so well, she took her departure. Benvolio seized the startled bookseller by the two hands and besieged him with questions. The bookseller, however, was able to answer but few of them. The young girl had been in his shop but once before, and had simply left an address, without any name. It was the address of which Benvolio had assured himself. The books she had ordered were all learned works—disquisitions on philosophy, on history, on the natural sciences, matters, all of them, in which she seemed an expert. For some of the volumes that she had just bespoken the bookseller was to send to foreign countries ; the others were to be despatched that evening to the address which the young girl had left. As Benvolio stood there the old bibliophile gathered these latter together, and while he was so engaged he uttered a little cry of distress : one of the volumes of a set was missing. The work was a rare one, and it would be hard to repair the loss. Benvolio on the instant had an inspiration ; he demanded leave of his friend to act as messenger : he himself would carry the books, as if he came from the shop, and he would explain

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the absence of the lost volume, and the bookseller's views about replacing it, far better than one of the hirelings. He asked leave, I say, but he did not wait till it was given ; he snatched up the pile of books and strode triumphantly away !



#### IV

As there was no name on the parcel, Benvolio, on reaching the old grey house over the wall of whose court an adventurous tendril stretched its long arm into the street, found himself wondering in what terms he should ask to have speech of the person for whom the books were intended. At any hazard he was determined not to retreat until he had caught a glimpse of the interior and its inhabitants ; for this was the same man, you must remember, who had scaled the moonlit wall of the Countess's garden. An old serving woman in a quaint cap answered his summons, and stood blinking out at the fading daylight from a little wrinkled white face, as if she had never been compelled to take so direct a look at it before. He informed her that he had come from the bookseller's, and that he had been charged with a personal message for the venerable gentleman who had bespoken the parcel. Might he crave license to speak with him ? This obsequious phrase was an improvisation of the moment—he had shaped it on the chance. But Benvolio had an indefinable conviction that it would fit the case ; the only thing that surprised him was the quiet complaisance of the old woman.

" If it's on a bookish errand you come, sir," she said, with a little wheezy sigh, " I suppose I only do my duty in admitting you ! "

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She led him into the house, through various dusky chambers, and at last ushered him into an apartment of which the side opposite to the door was occupied by a broad, low casement. Through its small old panes there came a green dim light—the light of the low western sun shining through the wet trees of the famous garden. Everything else was ancient and brown; the walls were covered with tiers upon tiers of books. Near the window, in the still twilight, sat two persons, one of whom rose as Benvolio came in. This was the young girl of the garden—the young girl who had been an hour since at the bookseller's. The other was an old man, who turned his head, but otherwise sat motionless.

Both his movement and his stillness immediately announced to Benvolio's quick perception that he was blind. In his quality of poet Benvolio was inventive; a brain that is constantly tapped for rhymes is tolerably alert. In a few moments, therefore, he had given a vigorous push to the wheel of fortune. Various things had happened. He had made a soft, respectful speech, he hardly knew about what; and the old man had told him he had a delectable voice—a voice that seemed to belong rather to a person of education than to a tradesman's porter. Benvolio confessed to having picked up an education, and the old man had thereupon bidden the young girl offer him a seat. Benvolio chose his seat where he could see her, as she sat at the low-browed casement. The bookseller in the square thought it likely Benvolio would come back that evening and give him an account of his errand, and before he closed his shop he looked up and down the street, to see whether the young man was approaching. Benvolio came, but the shop was closed. This he never noticed, however; he walked three times round all the arcades, without noticing it. He was thinking of something

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else. He had sat all the evening with the blind old scholar and his daughter, and he was thinking intently, ardently of them. When I say of them, of course I mean of the daughter.

A few days afterwards he got a note from the Countess, saying it would give her pleasure to receive his visit. He immediately wrote to her that, with a thousand regrets, he found himself urgently occupied in town and must beg leave to defer his departure for a day or two. The regrets were perfectly sincere, but the plea was none the less valid. Benvolio had become deeply interested in his tranquil neighbours, and, for the moment, a certain way the young girl had of looking at him—fixing her eyes, first, with a little vague, half-absent smile, on an imaginary point above his head, and then slowly dropping them till they met his own—was quite sufficient to make him happy. He had called once more on her father, and once more, and yet once more, and he had a vivid prevision that he should often call again. He had been in the garden and found its mild mouldiness even more delightful on a nearer view. He had pulled off his very ill-fitting mask, and let his neighbours know that his trade was not to carry parcels, but to scribble verses. The old man had never heard of his verses; he read nothing that had been published later than the sixteenth century; and nowadays he could read only with his daughter's eyes. Benvolio had seen the little white volume on the table, and assured himself it was his own; and he noted the fact that in spite of its well-thumbed air, the young girl had never given her father a hint of its contents. I said just now that several things had happened in the first half-hour of Benvolio's first visit. One of them was that this modest maiden fell in love with our young man. What happened when she learned that he was the author of the little white volume, I

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hardly know how to express ; her innocent passion began to throb and flutter. Benvolio possessed an old quarto volume bound in Russia leather, about which there clung an agreeable pungent odour. In this old quarto he kept a sort of diary—if that can be called a diary in which a whole year had sometimes been allowed to pass without an entry. On the other hand, there were some interminable records of a single day. Turning it over you would have chanced, not infrequently, upon the name of the Countess ; and at this time you would have observed on every page some mention of “ the Professor ” and of a certain person named Scholastica. Scholastica, you will immediately guess, was the Professor’s daughter. Probably this was not her own name, but it was the name by which Benvolio preferred to know her, and we need not be more exact than he. By this time of course he knew a great deal about her, and about her venerable sire. The Professor, before the loss of his eyesight and his health, had been one of the stateliest pillars of the University. He was now an old man ; he had married late in life. When his infirmities came upon him he gave up his chair and his classes and buried himself in his library. He made his daughter his reader and his secretary, and his prodigious memory assisted her clear young voice and her softly-moving pen. He was held in great honour in the scholastic world ; learned men came from afar to consult the blind sage and to appeal to his wisdom as to the ultimate law. The University settled a pension upon him, and he dwelt in a dusky corner, among the academic shades. The pension was small, but the old scholar and the young girl lived with conventual simplicity. It so happened, however, that he had a brother, or rather a half-brother, who was not a bookish man, save as regarded his ledger and day-

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book. This personage had made money in trade, and had retired, wifeless and childless, into the old grey house attached to Benvolio's garden. He had the reputation of a skinflint, a curmudgeon, a bloodless old miser who spent his days in shuffling about his mouldy mansion, making his pockets jingle, and his nights in lifting his money-bags out of trapdoors and counting over his hoard. He was nothing but a chilling shadow, an evil name, a pretext for a curse ; no one had ever seen him, much less crossed his threshold. But it seemed that he had a soft spot in his heart. He wrote one day to his brother, whom he had not seen for years, that the rumour had come to him that he was blind, infirm, and poor ; that he himself had a large house with a garden behind it ; and that if the Professor were not too proud, he was welcome to come and lodge there. The Professor had come, in this way, a few weeks before, and though it would seem that to a sightless old ascetic all lodgings might be the same, he took a great satisfaction in his new abode. His daughter found it a paradise, compared with their two narrow chambers under the old gable of the University, where, amid the constant coming and going of students, a young girl was compelled to lead a cloistered life.

Benvolio had assigned as his motive for intrusion, when he had been obliged to acknowledge his real character, an irresistible desire to ask the old man's opinion on certain knotty points of philosophy. This was a pardonable fiction, for the event, at any rate, justified it. Benvolio, when he was fairly launched in a philosophical discussion, was capable of forgetting that there was anything in the world but metaphysics ; he revelled in transcendent abstractions and became unconscious of all concrete things—even of that most brilliant of concrete things,

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the Countess. He longed to embark on a voyage of discovery on the great sea of pure reason. He knew that from such voyages the deep-browed adventurer rarely returns ; but if he were to find an El Dorado of thought, why should he regret the dusky world of fact ? Benvolio had high colloquies with the Professor, who was a devout Neo-Platonist, and whose venerable wit had spun to subtler tenuity the ethereal speculations of the Alexandrian school. Benvolio at this season declared that study and science were the only game in life worth the candle, and wondered how he could ever for an instant have cared for more vulgar exercises. He turned off a little poem in the style of Milton's *Penseroso*, which, if it had not quite the merit of that famous effusion, was at least the young man's own happiest performance. When Benvolio liked a thing he liked it as a whole—it appealed to all his senses. He relished its accidents, its accessories, its material envelope. In the satisfaction he took in his visits to the Professor it would have been hard to say where the charm of philosophy began or ended. If it began with a glimpse of the old man's mild, sightless blue eyes, sitting fixed beneath his shaggy white brows like patches of pale winter sky under a high-piled cloud, it hardly ended before it reached the little black bow on Scholastica's slipper ; and certainly it had taken a comprehensive sweep in the interval. There was nothing in his friends that had not a charm, an interest, a character, for his appreciative mind. Their seclusion, their stillness, their super-simple notions of the world and the world's ways, the faint, musty perfume of the University which hovered about them, their brown old apartment, impenetrable to the rumours of the town—all these things were part of his entertainment. Then the essence of it perhaps was that in this silent, simple life the intellectual key, if you touched it,

was so finely resonant. In the way of thought there was nothing into which his friends were not initiated—nothing they could not understand. The mellow light of their low-browed room, streaked with the moted rays that slanted past the dusky book-shelves, was the atmosphere of intelligence. All this made them, humble folk as they were, not so simple as they at first appeared. They, too, in their own fashion, knew the world; they were not people to be patronised; to visit them was not a condescension, but a privilege.

In the Professor this was not surprising. He had passed fifty years in arduous study, and it was proper to his character and his office that he should be erudite and venerable. But his devoted little daughter seemed to Benvolio at first almost grotesquely wise. She was an anomaly, a prodigy, a charming monstrosity. Charming, at any rate, she was, and as pretty, I must lose no more time in saying, as had seemed likely to Benvolio at his window. And yet, even on a nearer view, her prettiness shone forth slowly. It was as if it had been covered with a series of film-like veils, which had to be successively drawn aside. And then it was such a homely, shrinking, subtle prettiness, that Benvolio, in the private record I have mentioned, never thought of calling it by the arrogant name of beauty. He called it by no name at all; he contented himself with enjoying it—with looking into the young girl's mild grey eyes and saying things, on purpose, that caused her candid smile to deepen until (like the broadening ripple of a lake) it reached a particular dimple in her left cheek. This was its maximum; no smile could do more, and Benvolio desired nothing better. Yet I cannot say he was in love with the young girl; he only liked her. But he liked her, no doubt, as a man likes a thing but once in his life.

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As he knew her better, the oddity of her great learning quite faded away ; it seemed delightfully natural, and he only wondered why there were not more women of the same pattern. Scholastica had imbibed the wine of science instead of her mother's milk. Her mother had died in her infancy, leaving her cradled in an old folio, three-quarters opened, like a wide V. Her father had been her nurse, her playmate, her teacher, her life-long companion, her only friend. He taught her the Greek alphabet before she knew her own, and fed her with crumbs from his scholastic revels. She had taken submissively what was given her, and, without knowing it, she grew up a little handmaid of science.

Benvolio perceived that she was not in the least a woman of genius. The passion for knowledge, of its own motion, would never have carried her far. But she had a perfect understanding—a mind as clear and still and natural as a woodland pool, giving back an exact and definite image of everything that was presented to it. And then she was so teachable, so diligent, so indefatigable. Slender and meagre as she was, and rather pale too, with being much within doors, she was never tired, she never had a headache, she never closed her book or laid down a pen with a sigh. Benvolio said to himself that she was exquisitely constituted for helping a man. What a work he might do on summer mornings and winter nights, with that brightly demure little creature at his side, transcribing, recollecting, sympathising ! He wondered how much she cared for these things herself ; whether a woman could care for them without being dry and harsh. It was in a great measure for information on this point that he used to question her eyes with the frequency that I have mentioned. But they never gave him a perfectly direct answer, and this was why he came and came again. They



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seemed to him to say, " If you could lead a student's life for my sake, I could be a life-long household scribe for yours." Was it divine philosophy that made Scholastica charming, or was it she that made philosophy divine ? I cannot relate everything that came to pass between these young people, and I must leave a great deal to your imagination. The summer waned, and when the autumn afternoons began to grow vague, the quiet couple in the old grey house had expanded to a talkative trio. For Benvolio the days had passed very fast ; the trio had talked of so many things. He had spent many an hour in the garden with the young girl, strolling in the weedy paths, or resting on a moss-grown bench. She was a delightful listener, because she not only attended, but she followed. Benvolio had known women to fix very beautiful eyes upon him, and watch with an air of ecstasy the movement of his lips, and yet had found them three minutes afterwards quite incapable of saying what he was talking about. Scholastica gazed at him, but she understood him too.

## V

You will say that my description of Benvolio has done him injustice, and that, far from being the sentimental weathercock I have depicted, he is proving himself a model of constancy. But mark the sequel! It was at this moment precisely that, one morning, having gone to bed the night before singing pæans to divine philosophy, he woke up with a headache, and in the worst of humours with abstract science. He remembered Scholastica telling him that she never had headaches, and the memory quite annoyed him. He suddenly found himself thinking of her as a neat little mechanical toy, wound up to turn pages and write a pretty hand, but with neither a head nor a heart that was capable of human ailments. He fell asleep again, and in one of those brief but vivid dreams that sometimes occur in the morning hours, he had a brilliant vision of the Countess. *She* was human beyond a doubt, and duly familiar with headaches and heartaches. He felt an irresistible desire to see her and to tell her that he adored her. This satisfaction was not unattainable, and before the day was over he was well on his way toward enjoying it. He left town and made his pilgrimage to her estate, where he found her holding her usual court and leading a merry life. He had meant to stay with her a week ; he stayed two months—the most entertaining months

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he had ever known. I cannot pretend of course to enumerate the diversions of this fortunate circle, or to say just how Benvolio spent every hour of his time. But if the summer had passed quickly with him, the autumn moved with a tread as light. He thought once in a while of Scholastica and her father—once in a while, I say, when present occupations suffered his thoughts to wander. This was not often, for the Countess had always, as the phrase is, a hundred arrows in her quiver. You see, the negative, with Benvolio, always implied as distinct a positive, and his excuse for being inconstant on one side was that he was at such a time very assiduous on another. He developed at this period a talent as yet untried and unsuspected; he proved himself capable of writing brilliant dramatic poetry. The long autumn evenings, in a great country house, were a natural occasion for the much-abused pastime known as private theatricals. The Countess had a theatre, and abundant material for a troupe of amateur players; all that was lacking was a play exactly adapted to her resources. She proposed to Benvolio to write one; the idea took his fancy; he shut himself up in the library, and in a week produced a masterpiece. He had found the subject, one day when he was pulling over the Countess's books, in an old MS. chronicle written by the chaplain of one of her late husband's ancestors. It was the germ of an admirable drama, and Benvolio greatly enjoyed his attempt to make a work of art of it. All his genius, all his imagination went into it. This was the proper mission of his faculties, he cried to himself—the study of warm human passions, the painting of rich dramatic pictures, not the dry chopping of logic. His play was acted with brilliant success, the Countess herself representing the heroine. Benvolio had never seen her

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don the buskin, and had no idea of her aptitude for the stage; but she was inimitable, she was a natural artist. What gives charm to life, Benvolio hereupon said to himself, is the element of the unexpected; and this one finds only in women of the Countess's type. And I should do wrong to imply that he here made an invidious comparison, for he did not even think of Scholastica. His play was repeated several times, and people were invited to see it from all the country round. There was a great bivouac of servants in the castle court; in the cold November nights a bonfire was lighted to keep the servants warm. It was a great triumph for Benvolio, and he frankly enjoyed it. He knew he enjoyed it, and how great a triumph it was, and he felt every disposition to drain the cup to the last drop. He relished his own elation, and found himself excellent company. He began immediately another drama—a comedy this time—and he was greatly interested to observe that when his work was on the stocks he found himself regarding all the people about him as types and available figures. Everything he saw or heard was grist to his mill; everything presented itself as possible material. Life on these terms became really very interesting, and for several nights the laurels of Molière kept Benvolio awake.

Delightful as this was, however, it could not last for ever. When the winter nights had begun, the Countess returned to town, and Benvolio came back with her, his unfinished comedy in his pocket. During much of the journey he was silent and abstracted, and the Countess supposed he was thinking of how he should make the most of that capital situation in his third act. The Countess's perspicacity was just sufficient to carry her so far—to lead her, in other words, into plausible mistakes. Benvolio

was really wondering what in the name of mystery had suddenly become of his inspiration, and why the witticisms in his play and his comedy had begun to seem as mechanical as the cracking of the post-boy's whip. He looked out at the scrubby fields, the rusty woods, the sullen sky, and asked himself whether *that* was the world to which it had been but yesterday his high ambition to hold up the mirror. The Countess's *dame de compagnie* sat opposite to him in the carriage. Yesterday he thought her, with her pale, discreet face, and her eager movements that pretended to be indifferent, a finished specimen of an entertaining genus. To-day he could only say that if there was a whole genus it was a thousand pities, for the poor lady struck him as miserably false and servile. The real seemed hideous ; he felt homesick for his dear familiar rooms between the garden and the square, and he longed to get into them and bolt his door and bury himself in his old arm-chair and cultivate idealism for evermore. The first thing he actually did on getting into them was to go to the window and look out into the garden. It had greatly changed in his absence, and the old maimed statues, which all the summer had been comfortably muffled in verdure, were now, by an odd contradiction of propriety, standing white and naked in the cold. I don't exactly know how soon it was that Benvolio went back to see his neighbours. It was after no great interval, and yet it was not immediately. He had a bad conscience, and he was wondering what he should say to them. It seemed to him now (though he had not thought of it sooner) that they might accuse him of neglecting them. He had appealed to their friendship, he had professed the highest esteem for them, and then he had turned his back on them without farewell, and without a word of explanation. He had not written to them ; in truth,

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during his sojourn with the Countess, it would not have been hard for him to persuade himself that they were people he had only dreamed about, or read about, at most, in some old volume of memoirs. People of their value, he could now imagine them saying, were not to be taken up and dropped for a fancy ; and if friendship was not to be friendship as they themselves understood it, it was better that he should forget them at once and for ever. It is perhaps too much to affirm that he imagined them saying all this ; they were too mild and civil, too unused to acting in self-defence. But they might easily receive him in a way that would imply a delicate resentment. Benvolio felt profaned, dishonoured, almost contaminated ; so that perhaps when he did at last return to his friends, it was because that was the simplest way to be purified. How did they receive him ? I told you a good way back that Scholastica was in love with him, and you may arrange the scene in any manner that best accords with this circumstance. Her forgiveness, of course, when once that chord was touched, was proportionate to her displeasure. But Benvolio took refuge both from his own compunction and from the young girl's reproaches, in whatever form these were conveyed, in making a full confession of what he was pleased to call his frivolity. As he walked through the naked garden with Scholastica, kicking the wrinkled leaves, he told her the whole story of his sojourn with the Countess. The young girl listened with bright intentness, as she would have listened to some thrilling passage in a romance ; but she neither sighed, nor looked wistful, nor seemed to envy the Countess or to repine at her own ignorance of the great world. It was all too remote for comparison ; it was not, for Scholastica, among the things that might have been. Benvolio talked to her very freely

about the Countess. If she liked it, he found on his side that it eased his mind ; and as he said nothing that the Countess would not have been flattered by, there was no harm done. Although, however, Benvolio uttered nothing but praise of this distinguished lady, he was very frank in saying that she and her way of life always left him at the end in a worse humour than when they found him. They were very well in their way, he said, but their way was not his way—it only seemed so at moments. For him, he was convinced, the only real felicity was in the pleasures of study ! Scholastica answered that it gave her high satisfaction to hear this, for it was her father's belief that Benvolio had a great aptitude for philosophical research, and that it was a sacred duty to cultivate so rare a faculty.

"And what is your belief ?" Benvolio asked, remembering that the young girl knew several of his poems by heart.

Her answer was very simple. "I believe you are a poet."

"And a poet oughtn't to run the risk of turning pedant ?"

"No," she answered ; "a poet ought to run all risks—even that one which for a poet is perhaps most cruel. But he ought to escape them all !"

Benvolio took great satisfaction in hearing that the Professor deemed that he had in him the making of a philosopher, and it gave an impetus to the zeal with which he returned to work.

## VI

OF course even the most zealous student cannot work always, and often, after a very philosophic day, Benvolio spent with the Countess a very sentimental evening. It is my duty as a veracious historian not to conceal the fact that he discoursed to the Countess about Scholastica. He gave such a puzzling description of her that the Countess declared that she must be a delightfully quaint creature and that it would be vastly amusing to know her. She hardly supposed Benvolio was in love with this little book-worm in petticoats, but to make sure—if that might be called making sure—she deliberately asked him. He said No ; he hardly saw how he could be, since he was in love with the Countess herself ! For a while this answer satisfied her, but as the winter went by she began to wonder whether there were not such a thing as a man being in love with two women at once. During many months that followed, Benvolio led a kind of double life. Sometimes it charmed him and gave him an inspiring sense of personal power. He haunted the domicile of his gentle neighbours, and drank deep of the garnered wisdom of the ages ; and he made appearances as frequent in the Countess's drawing-room, where he played his part with magnificent zest and ardour. It was a life of alternation and contrast, and it really demanded a vigorous and elastic temperament.



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Sometimes his own seemed to him quite inadequate to the occasion—he felt fevered, bewildered, exhausted. But when it came to the point of choosing one thing or the other, it was impossible to give up either his worldly habits or his studious aspirations. Benvolio raged inwardly at the cruel limitations of the human mind, and declared it was a great outrage that a man should not be personally able to do everything he could imagine doing. I hardly know how she contrived it, but the Countess was at this time a more engaging woman than she had ever been. Her beauty acquired an ampler and richer cast, and she had a manner of looking at you as she slowly turned away with a vague reproachfulness that was at the same time an encouragement, which had lighted a hopeless flame in many a youthful breast. Benvolio one day felt in the mood for finishing his comedy, and the Countess and her friends acted it. Its success was no less brilliant than that of its predecessor, and the manager of the theatre immediately demanded the privilege of producing it. You will hardly believe me, however, when I tell you that on the night that his comedy was introduced to the public, its eccentric author sat discussing the absolute and the relative with the Professor and his daughter. Benvolio had all winter been observing that Scholastica never looked so pretty as when she sat, of a winter's night, plying a quiet needle in the mellow circle of a certain antique brass lamp. On the night in question he happened to fall a-thinking of this picture, and he tramped out across the snow for the express purpose of looking at it. It was sweeter even than his memory promised, and it banished every thought of his theatrical honours from his head. Scholastica gave him some tea, and her tea, for mysterious reasons, was delicious; better, strange to say, than that of the Countess, who, however, it must be added,

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recovered her ground in coffee. The Professor's parsimonious brother owned a ship which made voyages to China and brought him goodly chests of the incomparable plant. He sold the cargo for great sums, but he kept a chest for himself. It was always the best one, and he had at this time carefully measured out a part of his annual dole, made it into a little parcel, and presented it to Scholastica. This is the secret history of Benvolio's fragrant cups. While he was drinking them on the night I speak of—I am ashamed to say how many he drank—his name, at the theatre, was being tossed across the footlights to a brilliant, clamorous multitude, who hailed him as the redeemer of the national stage. But I am not sure that he even told his friends that his play was being acted. Indeed, this was hardly possible, for I meant to say just now that he had forgotten it.

It is very certain, however, that he enjoyed the criticisms the next day in the newspapers. Radiant and jubilant, he went to see the Countess, with half-a-dozen of them in his pocket. He found her looking terribly dark. She had been at the theatre, prepared to revel in his triumph—to place on his head with her own hand, as it were, the laurel awarded by the public; and his absence had seemed to her a sort of personal slight. Yet his triumph had nevertheless given her an exceeding pleasure, for it had been the seal of her secret hopes of him. Decidedly he was to be a great man, and this was not the moment for letting him go! At the same time there was something noble in his indifference, his want of eagerness, his finding it so easy to forget his honours. It was only an intellectual Cræsus, the Countess said to herself, who could afford to keep so loose an account with fame. But she insisted on knowing where he had been, and he told her

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he had been discussing philosophy and tea with the Professor.

"And was not the daughter there?" the Countess demanded.

"Most sensibly!" he cried. And then he added in a moment—"I don't know whether I ever told you, but she's almost as pretty as you."

The Countess resented the compliment to Scholastica much more than she enjoyed the compliment to herself. She felt an extreme curiosity to see this inky-fingered syren, and as she seldom failed, sooner or later, to compass her desires, she succeeded at last in catching a glimpse of her innocent rival. To do so she was obliged to set a great deal of machinery in motion. She induced Benvolio to give a lunch, in his rooms, to some ladies who professed a desire to see his works of art, and of whom she constituted herself the chaperon. She took care that he threw open a certain vestibule that looked into the garden, and here, at the window, she spent much of her time. There was but a chance that Scholastica would come forth into the garden, but it was a chance worth staking something upon. The Countess gave to it time and temper, and she was finally rewarded. Scholastica came out. The poor girl strolled about for half an hour, in profound unconsciousness that the Countess's fine eyes were devouring her. The impression she made was singular. The Countess found her both pretty and ugly: she did not admire her herself, but she understood that Benvolio might. For herself, personally, she detested her, and when Scholastica went in and she turned away from the window, her first movement was to pass before a mirror, which showed her something that, impartially considered, seemed to her a thousand times more beautiful. The Countess made no comments, and took good care Benvolio did not suspect the trick

she had played him. There was something more she promised herself to do, and she impatiently awaited her opportunity.

In the middle of the winter she announced to him that she was going to spend ten days in the country ; she had received the most attractive accounts of the state of things on her domain. There had been great snow-falls, and the sleighing was magnificent ; the lakes and streams were solidly frozen, there was an unclouded moon, and the resident gentry were skating, half the night, by torch-light. The Countess was passionately fond both of sleighing and skating, and she found this picture irresistible. And then she was charitable, and observed that it would be a kindness to the poor resident gentry, whose usual pleasures were of a frugal sort, to throw open her house and give a ball or two, with the village fiddlers. Perhaps even they might organise a bear-hunt—an entertainment at which, if properly conducted, a lady might be present as spectator. The Countess told Benvolio **all this** one day as he sat with her in her **boudoir, in the fire-light**, during the hour that precedes dinner. She had said more than once that he must decamp—that she must go and dress ; but neither of them had moved. She did not invite him to go with her to the country ; she only watched him as he sat gazing with a frown at the fire-light—the crackling blaze of the great logs which had been cut in the Countess's bear-haunted forests. At last she rose impatiently, and fairly turned him out. After he had gone she stood for a moment looking at the fire, with the tip of her foot on the fender. She had not to wait long ; he came back within the minute—came back and begged her leave to go with her to the country—to skate with her in the crystal moonlight and dance with her to the sound of the village violins. It hardly matters in what terms his request

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was granted ; the notable point is that he made it. He was her only companion, and when they were established in the castle the hospitality extended to the resident gentry was less abundant than had been promised. Benvolio, however, did not complain of the absence of it, because, for the week or so, he was passionately in love with his hostess. They took long sleigh-rides and drank deep of the poetry of winter. The blue shadows on the snow, the cold amber lights in the west, the leafless twigs against the snow-charged sky, all gave them extraordinary pleasure. The nights were even better, when the great silver stars, before the moonrise, glittered on the polished ice, and the young Countess and her lover, firmly joining hands, launched themselves into motion and into the darkness and went *skimming* for miles with their winged steps. On their return, before the great chimney-place in the old library, they lingered a while and drank little cups of wine heated with spices. It was perhaps here, cup in hand—this point is uncertain—that Benvolio broke through the last bond of his reserve, and told the Countess that he loved her, in a manner to satisfy her. To be his in all solemnity, his only and his for ever—this he explicitly, passionately, imperiously demanded of her. After this she gave her ball to her country neighbours, and Benvolio danced, to a boisterous, swinging measure, with a dozen ruddy beauties dressed in the fashions of the year before last. The Countess danced with the lusty male counterparts of these damsels, but she found plenty of chances to watch Benvolio. Toward the end of the evening she saw him looking grave and bored, with very much such a frown in his forehead as when he had sat staring at the fire that last day in her boudoir. She said to herself for the hundredth time that he was the strangest of mortals.

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On their return to the city she had frequent occasions to say it again. He looked at moments as if he had repented of his bargain—as if it did not at all suit him that his being the Countess's only lover should involve her being his only mistress. She deemed now that she had acquired the right to make him give an account of his time, and he did not conceal the fact that the first thing he had done on reaching town was to go to see his eccentric neighbours. She treated him hereupon to a passionate outburst of jealousy; called Scholastica a dozen harsh names—a little dingy blue-stockings, a little underhand, hypocritical Puritan; demanded he should promise never to speak to her again, and summoned him to make a choice once for all. Would he belong to her, or to that odious little school-mistress? It must be one thing or the other; he must take her or leave her; it was impossible she should have a lover who was so little to be depended upon. The Countess did not say this made her unhappy, but she repeated a dozen times that it made her ridiculous. Benvolio turned very pale; she had never seen him so before; a great struggle was evidently taking place within him. A terrible scene was the consequence. He broke out into reproaches and imprecations; he accused the Countess of being his bad angel, of making him neglect his best faculties, mutilate his genius, squander his life; and yet he confessed that he was committed to her, that she fascinated him beyond resistance, and that, at any sacrifice, he must still be her slave. This confession gave the Countess uncommon satisfaction, and made up in a measure for the unflattering remarks that accompanied it. She on her side confessed—what she had always been too proud to acknowledge hitherto—that she cared vastly for him, and that she had waited for long months for him to say something

of this kind. They parted on terms which it would be hard to define—full of mutual resentment and devotion, at once adoring and hating each other. All this was deep and stirring emotion, and Benvolio, as an artist, always in one way or another found his profit in emotion, even when it lacerated or suffocated him. There was, moreover, a sort of elation in having burnt his ships behind him, and vowed to seek his fortune, his intellectual fortune, in the tumult of life and action. He did no work ; his power of work, for the time at least, was paralysed. Sometimes this frightened him ; it seemed as if his genius were dead, his career cut short ; at other moments his faith soared supreme ; he heard, in broken murmurs, the voice of the muse, and said to himself that he was only resting, waiting, storing up knowledge. Before long he felt tolerably tranquil again ; ideas began to come to him, and the world to seem entertaining. He demanded of the Countess that, without further delay, their union should be solemnised. But the Countess, at that interview I have just related, had, in spite of her high spirit, received a great fright. Benvolio, stalking up and down with clenched hands and angry eyes, had seemed to her a terrible man to marry ; and though she was conscious of a strong will of her own, as well as of robust nerves, she had shuddered at the thought that such scenes might often occur. She had hitherto seen little but the mild and genial, or at most the joyous and fantastic side of her friend's disposition ; but it now appeared that there was another side to be taken into account, and that if Benvolio had talked of sacrifices, these were not all to be made by him. They say the world likes its master—that a horse of high spirit likes being well ridden. This may be true in the long run ; but the Countess, who was essentially a woman of the world, was not yet prepared

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to pay our young man the tribute of her luxurious liberty. She admired him more, now that she was afraid of him, but at the same time she liked him a trifle less. She answered that marriage was a very serious matter ; that they had lately had a taste of each other's tempers ; that they had better wait a while longer ; that she had made up her mind to travel for a year, and that she strongly recommended him to come with her, for travelling was notoriously an excellent test of friendship.



## VII

SHE went to Italy, and Benvolio went with her ; but before he went he paid a visit to his other mistress. He flattered himself that he had burnt his ships behind him, but the fire was still visibly smouldering. It is true, nevertheless, that he passed a very strange half-hour with Scholastica and her father. The young girl had greatly changed ; she barely greeted him ; she looked at him coldly. He had no idea her face could wear that look ; it vexed him to find it there. He had not been to see her for many weeks, and he now came to tell her that he was going away for a year ; it is true these were not conciliatory facts. But she had taught him to think that she possessed in perfection the art of trustful resignation, of unprotesting, cheerful patience—virtues that sat so gracefully on her bended brow that the thought of their being at any rate supremely becoming took the edge from his remorse at making them necessary. But now Scholastica looked older as well as sadder, and decidedly not so pretty. Her figure was meagre, her movements were angular, her charming eye was dull. After the first minute he avoided this charming eye ; it made him uncomfortable. Her voice she scarcely allowed him to hear. The Professor, as usual, was serene and frigid, impartial and transcendental. There was a chill in the air, a shadow between them. Benvolio went so far as to wonder that he had ever

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found a great attraction in the young girl, and his present disillusionment gave him even more anger than pain. He took leave abruptly and coldly, and puzzled his brain for a long time afterward over the mystery of Scholastica's reserve.

The Countess had said that travelling was a test of friendship ; in this case friendship (or whatever the passion was to be called) promised for some time to resist the test. Benvolio passed six months of the liveliest felicity. The world has nothing better to offer to a man of sensibility than a first visit to Italy during those years of life when perception is at its keenest, when knowledge has arrived, and yet youth has not departed. He made with the Countess a long, slow progress through the lovely land, from the Alps to the Sicilian sea ; and it seemed to him that his imagination, his intellect, his genius, expanded with every breath and rejoiced in every glance. The Countess was in an almost equal ecstasy, and their sympathy was perfect in all points save the lady's somewhat indiscriminate predilection for assemblies and receptions. She had a thousand letters of introduction to deliver, which entailed a vast deal of social exertion. Often, on balmy nights when he would have preferred to meditate among the ruins of the Forum, or to listen to the moonlit ripple of the Adriatic, Benvolio found himself dragged away to kiss the hand of a decayed princess, or to take a pinch from the snuff-box of an epicurean cardinal. But the cardinals, the princesses, the ruins, the warm southern tides which seemed the voice of history itself—these and a thousand other things resolved themselves into an immense pictorial spectacle—the very stuff that inspiration is made of. Everything Benvolio had written before coming to Italy now appeared to him worthless ; this was the needful stamp, the consecration of talent. One day, how-

ever, his felicity was clouded ; by a trifle you will say, possibly ; but you must remember that in men of Benvolio's disposition primary impulses are almost always produced by small accidents. The Countess, speaking of the tone of voice of some one they had met, happened to say that it reminded her of the voice of that queer little woman ~~at home~~—the daughter of the blind Professor. ~~Was this pure~~ inadvertence, or was it malicious design ? Benvolio never knew, though he immediately demanded of her, in surprise, when and where she had heard Scholastica's voice. His whole attention was aroused ; the Countess perceived it, and for a moment she hesitated. Then she bravely replied that she had seen the young girl in the musty old book-room where she spent her dreary life. At these words, uttered in a profoundly mocking tone, Benvolio had an extraordinary sensation. He was walking with the Countess in the garden of a palace, and they had just approached the low balustrade of a terrace which commanded a magnificent view. On one side were violet Apennines, dotted here and there with a gleaming castle or convent ; on the other stood the great palace through whose galleries the two had just been strolling, with its walls encrusted with medallions and its cornice charged with statues. But Benvolio's heart began to beat ; the tears sprang to his eyes ; the perfect landscape around him faded away and turned to blankness, and there rose before him, distinctly, vividly present, the old brown room that looked into the dull northern garden, tenanted by the quiet figures he had once told himself that he loved. He had a choking sensation and a sudden overwhelming desire to return to his own country.

The Countess would say nothing more than that the fancy had taken her one day to go and see Scholastica. " I suppose I may go where I please ! "

she cried in the tone of the great lady who is accustomed to believe that her glance confers honour wherever it falls. "I am sure I did her no harm. She's a good little creature, and it's not her fault if she's so ridiculously plain." Benvolio looked at her intently, but he saw that he should learn nothing from her that she did not choose to tell. As he stood there, he was amazed to find how natural, or at least how easy, it was to disbelieve her. She had been with the young girl; that accounted for anything; it accounted abundantly for Scholastica's painful constraint. What had the Countess said and done? what infernal trick had she played upon the poor girl's simplicity? He helplessly wondered, but he felt that she could be trusted to hit her mark. She had done him the honour to be jealous, and in order to alienate Scholastica she had invented some ingenious calumny against himself. He felt sick and angry, and for a week he treated his companion with grim indifference. The charm was broken, the cup of pleasure was drained. This remained no secret to the Countess, who was furious at the mistake she had made. At last she abruptly told Benvolio that the test had failed; they must separate, he would gratify her by taking his leave. He asked no second permission, but bade her farewell in the midst of her little retinue, and went journeying out of Italy with no other company than his thick-swarming memories and projects.

The first thing he did on reaching home was to repair to the Professor's abode. The old man's chair, for the first time, was empty, and Scholastica was not in the room. He went out into the garden, where, after wandering hither and thither, he found the young girl seated in a dusky arbour. She was dressed, as usual, in black; but her head was drooping, her empty hands were folded, and her sweet face was

more joyless even than when he had last seen it. If she had been changed then, she was doubly changed now. Benvolio looked round, and as the Professor was nowhere visible, he immediately guessed the cause of her mourning aspect. The good old man had gone to join his immortal brothers, the classic sages, and Scholastica was utterly alone. She seemed frightened at seeing him, but he took her hand, and she let him sit down beside her. "Whatever you were once told that made you think ill of me is detestably false," he said. "I have the tenderest friendship for you, and now more than ever I should like to show it." She slowly gathered courage to meet his eyes; she found them reassuring, and at last, though she never told him in what way her mind had been poisoned, she suffered him to believe that her old confidence had come back. She told him how her father had died, and how, in spite of the philosophic maxims he had bequeathed to her for her consolation, she felt very lonely and helpless. Her uncle had offered her a maintenance, meagre but sufficient; she had the old serving-woman to keep her company, and she meant to live in her present abode and occupy herself with collecting her father's papers and giving them to the world according to a plan for which he had left particular directions. She seemed irresistibly tender and touching, and yet full of dignity and self-support. Benvolio fell in love with her again on the spot, and only abstained from telling her so because he remembered just in time that he had an engagement to be married to the Countess, and that this understanding had not yet been formally rescinded. He paid Scholastica a long visit, and they went in together and rummaged over her father's books and papers. The old scholar's literary memoranda proved to be extremely valuable; it would be a useful and interesting task to give them

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to the world. When Scholastica heard Benvolio's high estimate of them her cheek began to glow and her spirit to revive. The present then was secure, she seemed to say to herself, and she would have occupation for many a month. He offered to give her every assistance in his power, and in consequence he came daily to see her. Scholastica lived so much out of the world that she was not obliged to trouble herself about vulgar gossip. Whatever jests were aimed at the young man for his visible devotion to a mysterious charmer, he was very sure that her ear was never wounded by base insinuations. The old serving-woman sat in a corner, nodding over her distaff, and the two friends held long confabulations over yellow manuscripts in which the commentary, it must be confessed, did not always adhere very closely to the text. Six months elapsed, and Benvolio found an ineffable charm in this mild mixture of sentiment and study. He had never in his life been so long of the same mind; it really seemed as if, as the phrase is, the fold were taken for ever—as if he had done with the world and were ready to live henceforth in the closet. He hardly thought of the Countess, and they had no correspondence. She was in Italy, in Greece, in the East, in the Holy Land, in places and situations that taxed the imagination.

One day, in the darkness of the vestibule, after he had left Scholastica, he was arrested by a little old man of sordid aspect, of whom he could make out hardly more than a pair of sharply-glowing eyes and an immense bald head, polished like a ball of ivory. He was a quite terrible little figure in his way, and Benvolio at first was frightened. "Mr Poet," said the old man, "let me say a single word I give my niece a maintenance. She may do what she likes. But she forfeits every penny of her allowance and her expectations if she is fool enough to

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marry a fellow who scribbles rhymes. I am told they are sometimes an hour finding two that will match ! Good evening, Mr. Poet ! " Benvolio heard a sound like the faint jingle of loose coin in a breeches pocket, and the old man abruptly retreated into his domiciliary gloom. Benvolio had never seen him before, and he had no wish ever to see him again. He had not proposed to himself to marry Scholastica, and even if he had, I am pretty sure he would now have taken the modest view of the matter and decided that his hand and heart were an insufficient compensation for the relinquishment of a miser's fortune. The young girl never spoke of her uncle ; he lived quite alone, apparently, haunting his upper chambers like a restless ghost, and sending her, by the old serving-woman, her slender monthly allowance, wrapped up in a piece of old newspaper. It was shortly after this that the Countess at last came back. Benvolio had been taking one of those long walks to which he had always been addicted, and passing through the public gardens on his way home, he had sat down on a bench to rest. In a few moments a carriage came rolling by ; in it sat the Countess—beautiful, sombre, solitary. He rose with a ceremonious salute, and she went her way. But in five minutes she passed back again, and this time her carriage stopped. She gave him a single glance, and he got in. For a week afterward Scholastica vainly awaited him. What had happened ? It had happened that though she had proved herself both false and cruel, the Countess again asserted her charm, and our precious hero again succumbed to it. But he resumed his visits to Scholastica after an interval of neglect not long enough to be unpardonable ; the only difference was that now they were not so frequent.

My story draws to a close, for I am afraid you have already lost patience with the history of this

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amiable weathercock. Another year ran its course, and the Professor's manuscripts were arranged in great piles and almost ready for the printer. Benvolio had had a constant hand in the work, and had found it exceedingly interesting; it involved inquiries and researches of the most stimulating and profitable kind. Scholastica was very happy. Her friend was often absent for many days, during which she knew he was leading the great world's life; but she had learned that if she patiently waited, the pendulum would swing back, and he would reappear and bury himself in their books and papers and talk. And their talk, you may be sure, was not all technical; they touched on everything that came into their heads, and Benvolio by no means felt obliged to be silent about those mundane matters as to which a vow of personal ignorance had been taken for his companion. He took her into his poetic confidence, and read her everything he had written since his return from Italy. The more he worked the more he desired to work; and so, at this time, occupied as he was with editing the Professor's manuscripts, he had never been so productive on his own account. He wrote another drama, on an Italian subject, which was performed with magnificent success; and this production he discussed with Scholastica scene by scene and speech by speech. He proposed to her to come and see it acted from a covered box, where her seclusion would be complete. She seemed for an instant to feel the force of the temptation; then she shook her head with a frank smile, and said it was better not. The play was dedicated to the Countess, who had suggested the subject to him in Italy, where it had been imparted to her, as a family anecdote, by one of her old princesses. This easy, fruitful, complex life might have lasted for ever, but for two most regrettable events. *Might* have lasted,



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I say ; you observe I do not affirm it positively. Scholastica lost her peace of mind ; she was suffering a secret annoyance. She concealed it as far as she might from her friend, and with some success ; for although he suspected something and questioned her, she persuaded him that it was his own fancy. In reality it was no fancy at all, but the very uncomfortable fact that her shabby old uncle, the miser, was a terrible thorn in her side. He had told Benvolio that she might do as she liked, but he had recently revoked this amiable concession. He informed her one day, by means of an illegible note, scrawled with a blunt pencil, on the back of an old letter, that her beggarly friend the Poet came to see her altogether too often ; that he was determined she never should marry a crack-brained rhymester ; and that he requested that before the sacrifice became too painful she would be so good as to dismiss Mr. Benvolio. This was accompanied by an intimation, more explicit than gracious, that he opened his money-bags only for those who deferred to his incomparable wisdom. Scholastica was poor, and simple, and lonely ; but she was proud, for all that, with a shrinking and unexpressed pride of her own, and her uncle's charity, proffered on these terms, became intolerably bitter to her soul. She sent him word that she thanked him for his past liberality, but she would no longer be a charge upon him. She said to herself that she could work ; she had a superior education ; many women, she knew, supported themselves. She even found something inspiring in the idea of going out into the world of which she knew so little, to seek her fortune. Her great desire, however, was to keep her situation a secret from Benvolio, and to prevent his knowing the sacrifice she was making for him. This it is especially that proves she was proud. It so happened that circum-

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stances made secrecy possible. I don't know whether the Countess had always an idea of marrying Benvolio, but her imperious vanity still suffered from the spectacle of his divided allegiance, and it suggested to her a truly malignant revenge. A brilliant political mission, to treat of a special question, was about to be despatched to a neighbouring government, and half-a-dozen young men of eminence were to be attached to it. The Countess had influence at Court, and without saying anything to Benvolio, she immediately urged his claim to a post on the ground of his distinguished services to literature. She pulled her wires so cleverly that in a very short time she had the pleasure of presenting him his appointment on a great sheet of parchment, from which the royal seal dangled by a blue ribbon. It involved an exile of but a few weeks, and to this, with her eye on the sequel of her project, she was able to resign herself. Benvolio's imagination took fire at the thought of spending a month at a foreign court, in the very hotbed of consummate diplomacy; this was a phase of experience with which he was as yet unacquainted. He departed, and no sooner had he gone than the Countess, at a venture, waited upon Scholastica. She knew the girl was poor, and she believed that in spite of her homely virtues she would not, if the opportunity were placed before her in a certain light, prove implacably indisposed to better her fortunes. She knew nothing of the young girl's contingent expectations from her uncle, and her interference at this juncture was simply a remarkable coincidence. She laid before her a proposal from a certain great lady, whose husband, an eminent general, had just been dubbed governor of an island on the other side of the globe. This lady desired a preceptress for her children; she had heard of Scholastica's merit, and she ventured to hope that she might persuade

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her to accompany her to the Antipodes and reside in her family. The offer was brilliant ; to Scholastica it seemed mysteriously and providentially opportune. Nevertheless she hesitated, and demanded time for reflexion ; without telling herself why, she wished to wait till Benvolio should return. He wrote her two or three letters, full of the echoes of his brilliant actual life, and without a word about the things that were nearer her own experience. The month elapsed, but he was still absent. Scholastica, who was in correspondence with the governor's wife, delayed her decision from week to week. She had sold her father's manuscripts to a publisher, for a very small sum, and gone, meanwhile, to live in a convent. At last the governor's lady demanded her ultimatum. The poor girl scanned the horizon, and saw no rescuing friend ; Benvolio was still at the court of Illyria ! What she saw was the Countess's fine eyes eagerly watching her over the top of her fan. They seemed to contain a horrible menace, and to hold somehow her happiness at their mercy. Her heart sank ; she gathered up her few possessions and set sail, with her illustrious protectors, for the Antipodes. Shortly after her departure Benvolio returned. He felt a terrible pang of rage and grief when he learned that she had gone ; he went to the Countess, prepared to accuse her of the basest treachery. But she checked his reproaches by arts that she had never gone so far as to use before, and promised him that, if he would trust her, he should never miss that pale-eyed little governess. It can hardly be supposed that he believed her ; but he appears to have been guilty of letting himself be persuaded without belief. For some time after this he almost lived with the Countess. He had, with infinite pains, purchased from his neighbour, the miser, the right of occupancy of the late Professor's

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apartment. This repulsive proprietor, in spite of his constitutional aversion to rhymesters, had not resisted the financial argument, and seemed greatly amazed that a poet should have a dollar to spend. Scholastica had left all things in their old places, but Benvolio, for the present, never went into the room. He turned the key in the door, and kept it in his waistcoat-pocket, where, while he was with the Countess, his fingers fumbled with it. Several months rolled by, and the Countess's promise was not verified. He missed Scholastica woefully, and missed her more as time elapsed. He began at last to go to the old brown room and to try to do some work there. He only half succeeded in a fashion ; it seemed dark and empty ; doubly empty when he remembered what it might have been. Suddenly he ceased to visit the Countess ; a long time passed without her seeing him. She met him at another house, and had some remarkable words with him. She covered him with reproaches that were doubtless deserved, but he made her an answer that caused her to open her eyes and flush, and admit afterward that, for a clever woman, she had been a great fool. " Don't you see," he said, " can't you imagine, that I cared for you only by contrast ? You took the trouble to kill the contrast, and with it you killed everything else. For a constancy I prefer *this* ! " And he tapped his poetic brow. He never saw the Countess again.

I rather regret now that I said at the beginning of my story that it was not to be a fairy-tale ; otherwise I should be at liberty to relate, with harmonious geniality, that if Benvolio missed Scholastica, he missed the Countess also, and led an extremely fretful and unproductive life, until one day he sailed for the Antipodes and brought Scholastica home. After this he began to produce again ; only, many people said that his poetry had become dismally dull. But excuse me ; I am writing as if it *were* a fairy-tale !

THE  
IMPRESSIONS OF A COUSIN



## I

NEW YORK, *April* 3, 1873.—There are moments when I feel that she has asked too much of me—especially since our arrival in this country. These three months have not done much toward making me happy here. I don't know what the difference is—or rather I do ; and I say this only because it's less trouble. It is no trouble, however, to say that I like New York less than Rome : that, after all, is the difference. And then there's nothing to sketch ! For ten years I have been sketching, and I really believe I do it very well. But how can I sketch Fifty-third Street ? There are times when I even say to myself, How can I even inhabit Fifty-third Street ? ~~When~~ I turn into it from the Fifth Avenue the vista seems too hideous : the narrow, impersonal houses, with the dry, hard tone of their brown-stone, a surface as uninteresting as that of sandpaper ; their steep, stiff stoops, giving you such a climb to the door ; their lumpish balustrades, porticoes, and cornices, turned out by the hundred and adorned with heavy excrescences—such an eruption of ornament and such a poverty of effect ! I suppose my superior tone would seem very pretentious if anybody were to read this shameless record of personal emotion ; and I should be asked why an expensive up-town residence is not as good as a slimy Italian palazzo. My answer, of course, is that I can sketch the palazzo and can do nothing with the up-

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town residence. I can live in it, of course, and be very grateful for the shelter ; but that doesn't count. Putting aside that odious fashion of popping into the " parlours " as soon as you cross the threshold—no interval, no approach—these places are wonderfully comfortable. This one of Eunice's is perfectly arranged ; and we have so much space that she has given me a sitting-room of my own—an immense luxury. Her kindness, her affection, are the most charming, delicate, natural thing I ever conceived. I don't know what can have put it into her head to like me so much ; I suppose I should say into her heart, only I don't like to write about Eunice's heart—that tender, shrinking, shade-loving, and above all fresh and youthful, organ. There is a certain self-complacency, perhaps, in my assuming that her generosity is mere affection ; for her conscience is so inordinately developed that she attaches the idea of duty to everything—even to her relations to a poor, plain, unloved and unlovable third-cousin. Whether she is fond of me or not, she thinks it right to be fond of me ; and the effort of her life is to do what is right. In matters of duty, in short, she is a real little artist ; and her masterpiece (in that way) is coming back here to live. She can't like it ; her tastes are not here. If she did like it, I am sure she would never have invented such a phrase as the one of which she delivered herself the other day—" I think one's life has more dignity in one's own country." That's a phrase made up after the fact. No one ever gave up living in Europe because there is a want of dignity in it. Poor Eunice talks of " one's own country " as if she kept the United States in the back-parlour. I have yet to perceive the dignity of living in Fifth-third Street. This, I suppose, is very treasonable ; but a woman isn't obliged to be patriotic. I believe I should be a good patriot if I could sketch my native town.



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But I can't make a picture of the brown-stone stoops in the Fifth Avenue, or the platform of the elevated railway in the Sixth. Eunice has suggested to me that I might find some subjects in the Park, and I have been there to look for them. But somehow the blistered *sentiers* of asphalt, the rock-work caverns, the huge iron bridges spanning little muddy lakes, the whole crowded, cockneyfied place, making up so many faces to look pretty, don't appeal to me—haven't, from beginning to end, a discoverable "bit." Besides, it's too cold to sit on a campstool under this clean-swept sky, whose depths of blue air do very well, doubtless, for the floor of heaven, but are quite too far away for the ceiling of earth. The sky over here seems part of the world at large; in Europe it's part of the particular place. In summer, I daresay, it will be better; and it will go hard with me if I don't find somewhere some leafy lane, some cottage roof, something in some degree mossy or mellow. Nature here, of course, is very fine, though I am afraid only in large pieces; and with my little yard-measure (it used to serve for the Roman Campagna!) I don't know what I shall be able to do. I must try to rise to the occasion.

The Hudson is beautiful; I remember that well enough; and Eunice tells me that when we are in *villeggiatura* we shall be close to the loveliest part of it. Her cottage, or villa, or whatever they call it (Mrs. Ermine, by the way, always speaks of it as a "country-seat"), is more or less opposite to West Point, where it makes one of its grandest sweeps. Unfortunately, it has been let these three years that she has been abroad, and will not be vacant till the first of June. Mr. Caliph, her trustee, took upon himself to do that; very unpertinently, I think, for certainly if I had Eunice's fortune I shouldn't let my houses—I mean, of course, those that are so personal. Least of all should I let

my "country-seat." It's bad enough for people to appropriate one's sofas and tables, without appropriating one's flowers and trees and even one's views. There is nothing so personal as one's horizon,—the horizon that one commands, whatever it is, from one's window. Nobody else has just that one. Mr. Caliph, by the way, is apparently a person of the incalculable, irresponsible sort. It would have been natural to suppose that having the greater part of my cousin's property in his care, he would be in New York to receive her at the end of a long absence and a boisterous voyage. Common civility would have suggested that, especially as he was an old friend, or rather a young friend, of both her parents. It was an odd thing to make him sole trustee; but that was Cousin Letitia's doing: "she thought it would be so much easier for Eunice to see only one person." I believe she had found **that** effort the limit of her own energy; but she might have known that Eunice would have given her best attention, every day, to twenty men of business, if such a duty had been presented to her. I don't think poor Cousin Letitia knew very much; Eunice speaks of her much less than she speaks of her father, whose death would have been the greater sorrow if she dared to admit to herself that she preferred one of her parents to the other. The number of things that the poor girl doesn't dare to admit to herself! One of them, I am sure, is that Mr. Caliph is acting improperly in spending three months in Washington, just at the moment when it would be most convenient to her to see him. He has pressing business there, it seems (he is a good deal of a politician—not that I know what people do in Washington), and he writes to Eunice every week or two that he will "finish it up" in ten days more, and then will be completely at her service; but he never finishes it up—never arrives. She has not seen him

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for three years ; he certainly, I think, ought to have come out to her in Europe. She doesn't know that, and I haven't cared to suggest it, for she wishes (very naturally) to think him a pearl of trustees. Fortunately he sends her all the money she needs ; and the other day he sent her his brother, a rather agitated (though not in the least agitating) youth, who presented himself about lunch-time—Mr. Caliph having (as he explained) told him that this was the best hour to call. What does Mr. Caliph know about it, by the way ? It's little enough he has tried ! Mr. Adrian Frank had of course nothing to say about business ; he only came to be agreeable, and to tell us that he had just seen his brother in Washington—as if that were any comfort ! They are brothers only in the sense that they are children of the same mother ; Mrs. Caliph having accepted consolations in her widowhood and produced this blushing boy, who is ten years younger than the accomplished Caliph. (I say accomplished Caliph for the phrase. I haven't the least idea of his accomplishments. Somehow, a man with that name ought to have a good many.) Mr. Frank, the second husband, is dead as well as herself, and the young man has a very good fortune. He is shy and simple, colours immensely and becomes alarmed at his own silences ; but is tall and straight and clear-eyed, and is, I imagine, a very estimable youth. Eunice says that he is as different as possible from his step-brother ; so that perhaps, though she doesn't mean it in that way, his step-brother is not estimable. I shall judge of that for myself, if he ever gives me a chance.

Young Frank, at any rate, is a gentleman, and in spite of his blushes has seen a great deal of the world. Perhaps that is what he is blushing for : there are so many things we humans have no reason to be proud of. He stayed to lunch, and talked a little about the far East—Babylon, Palmyra, Ispahan, and that sort

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of thing—from which he is lately returned. He also is a sketcher, though evidently he doesn't show. . He asked to see my things, however ; and I produced a few old water-colours, of other days and other climes, which I have luckily brought to America—produced them with my usual calm assurance. It was clear he thought me very clever ; so I suspect that in not showing he himself is rather wise. When I said there was nothing here to sketch, that rectangular towns won't do, etc., he asked me why I didn't try people. What people ? the people in the Fifth Avenue ? They are even less pictorial than their houses. I don't perceive that those in the Sixth are any better, or those in the Fourth and Third, or in the Seventh and Eighth. Good heavens ! what a nomenclature ! The city of New York is like a tall sum in addition, and the streets are like columns of figures. What a place for me to live, who hate arithmetic ! I have tried Mrs. Ermine, but that is only because she asked me to : Mrs. Ermine asks for whatever she wants. I don't think she cares for it much, for though it's bad, it's not bad enough to please her. I thought she would be rather easy to do, as her countenance is made up largely of negatives—no colour, no form, no intelligence ; I should simply have to leave a sort of brilliant blank. I found, however, there was difficulty in representing an expression which consisted so completely of the absence of that article. With her large, fair, featureless face, unilluminated by a ray of meaning, she makes the most incoherent, the most unexpected, remarks. She asked Eunice, the other day, whether she should not bring a few gentlemen to see her—she seemed to know so few, to be so lonely. Then when Eunice thanked her, and said she needn't take that trouble : she was not lonely, and in any case did not desire her solitude to be peopled in that manner—Mrs. Ermine declared blandly that it was all right,

but that she supposed this was the great advantage of being an orphan, that you might have gentlemen brought to see you. "I don't like being an orphan, even for that," said Eunice; who indeed does not like it at all, though she will be twenty-one next month, and has had several years to get used to it. Mrs. Ermine is very vulgar, yet she thinks she has high distinction. I am very glad our cousinship is not on the same side. Except that she is an idiot and a bore, however, I think there is no harm in her. Her time is spent in contemplating the surface of things—and for that I don't blame her, for I myself am very fond of the surface. But she doesn't see what she looks at, and in short is very tiresome. That is one of the things poor Eunice won't admit to herself—that Lizzie Ermine will end by boring us to death. Now that both her daughters are married, she has her time quite on her hands; for the sons-in-law, I am sure, can't encourage her visits. She may, however, contrive to be with them as well as here, for, as a poor young husband once said to me, a *belle-mère*, after marriage, is as inevitable as stickiness after eating honey. A fool can do plenty of harm without deep intentions. After all, intentions fail; and what you know an accident by is that it doesn't. Mrs. Ermine doesn't like me; she thinks she ought to be in my shoes—that when Eunice lost her old governess, who had remained with her as "companion," she ought, instead of picking me up in Rome, to have come home and thrown herself upon some form of kinship more cushiony. She is jealous of me, and vexed that I don't give her more opportunities; for I know that she has made up her mind that I ought to be a Bohemian: in that case she could persuade Eunice that I am a very unfit sort of person. I am single, not young, not pretty, not well off, and not very desirous to please; I carry a palette on my

thumb, and very often have stains on my apron—though except for those stains I pretend to be immaculately neat. What right have I *not* to be a Bohemian; and not to teach Eunice to make cigarettes? I am convinced Mrs. Ermine is disappointed that I don't smoke. Perhaps, after all, she is right, and that I am too much a creature of habits, of rules. A few people have been good enough to call me an artist; but I am not. I am only, in a small way, a worker. I walk too straight; it's ten years since any one asked me to dance! I wish I could oblige you, Mrs. Ermine, by dipping into Bohemia once in a while. But one can't have the defects of the qualities one doesn't possess. I am not an artist, I am too much of a critic. I suppose a she-critic is a kind of monster; women should only be criticised. That's why I keep it all to myself—myself being this little book. I grew tired of myself some months ago, and locked myself up in a desk. It was a kind of punishment, but it was also a great rest, to stop judging, to stop caring, for a while. Now that I have come out, I suppose I ought to take a vow not to be ill-natured.

As I read over what I have written here, I wonder whether it was worth while to have reopened my journal. Still, why not have the benefit of being thought disagreeable—the luxury of recorded observation? If one is poor, plain, proud—and in this very private place I may add, clever—there are certain necessary revenges!

*April 10.*—Adrian Frank has been here again, and we rather like him. (That will do for the first note of a more genial tone.) His eyes are very blue, and his teeth very white—two things that always please me. He became rather more communicative, and almost promised to show me his sketches—in spite of the fact that he is evidently as much as ever struck

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with my own ability. Perhaps he has discovered that I am trying to be genial ! He wishes to take us to drive—that is, to take Eunice ; for of course I shall go only for propriety. She doesn't go with young men alone ; that element was not included in her education. She said to me yesterday, " The only man I shall drive alone with will be the one I marry." She talks so little about marrying that this made an impression on me. That subject is supposed to be a girl's inevitable topic ; but no young women could occupy themselves with it less than she and I do. I think I may say that we never mention it at all. I suppose that if a man were to read this he would be greatly surprised and not particularly edified. As there is no danger of any man's reading it, I may add that I always take tacitly for granted that Eunice will marry. She doesn't in the least pretend that she won't ; and if I am not mistaken she is capable of the sort of affection that is expected of a good wife. The longer I live with her the more I see that she is a dear girl. Now that I know her better, I perceive that she is perfectly natural. I used to think that she tried too much—that she watched herself, perhaps, with a little secret admiration. But that was because I couldn't conceive of a girl's motives being so simple. She only wants not to suffer—she is immensely afraid of that. Therefore, she wishes to be universally tender—to mitigate the general sum of suffering, in the hope that she herself may come off easily. Poor thing ! she doesn't know that we can diminish the amount of suffering for others only by taking to ourselves a part of their share. The amount of that commodity in the world is always the same ; it is only the distribution that varies. We all try to dodge our portion, and some of us succeed. I find the best way is not to think about it, and to make little water-colours. Eunice thinks that the best

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way is to be very generous, to condemn no one unheard.

A great many things happen that I don't mention here ; incidents of social life, I believe they call them. People come to see us, and sometimes they invite us to dinner. We go to certain concerts, many of which are very good. We take a walk every day ; and I read to Eunice, and she plays to me. Mrs. Ermine makes her appearance several times a week, and gives us the news of the town—a great deal more of it than we have any use for. She thinks we live in a hole ; and she has more than once expressed her conviction that I can do nothing socially for Eunice. As to that, she is perfectly right ; I am aware of my social insignificance. But I am equally aware that my cousin has no need of being pushed. I know little of the people and things of this place ; but I know enough to see that, whatever they are, the best of them are at her service. Mrs. Ermine thinks it a great pity that Eunice should have come too late in the season to "go out" with her ; for after this there are few entertainments at which my protecting presence is not sufficient. Besides, Eunice isn't eager ; I often wonder at her indifference. She never thinks of the dances she has missed, nor asks about those at which she still may figure. She isn't sad, and it doesn't amount to melancholy ; but she certainly is rather detached. She likes to read, to talk with me, to make music, and to dine out when she supposes there will be "real conversation." She is extremely fond of real conversation ; and we flatter ourselves that a good deal of it takes place between us. We talk about life and religion and art and George Eliot ; all that, I hope, is sufficiently real. Eunice understands everything, and has a great many opinions ; she is quite the modern young woman, though she hasn't modern manners. But all this doesn't explain to me



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why, as Mrs. Ermine says, she should wish to be so dreadfully quiet. That lady's suspicion to the contrary notwithstanding, it is not I who make her so. I would go with her to a party every night if she should wish it, and send out cards to proclaim that we "receive." But her ambitions are not those of the usual girl ; or, at any rate, if she is waiting for what the usual girl waits for, she is waiting very patiently. As I say, I can't quite make out the secret of her patience. However, it is not necessary I should ; it was no part of the bargain on which I came to her that we were to conceal nothing from each other. I conceal a great deal from Eunice ; at least I hope I do : for instance, how fearfully I am bored. I think I am as patient as she ; but then I have certain things to help me—my age, my resignation, my ability, and, I suppose I may add, my conceit. Mrs. Ermine doesn't bring the young men, but she talks about them, and calls them Harry and Freddy. She wants Eunice to marry, though I don't see what she is to gain by it. It is apparently a disinterested love of matrimony—or rather, I should say, a love of weddings. She lives in a world of "engagements," and announces a new one every time she comes in. I never heard of so much marrying in all my life before. Mrs. Ermine is dying to be able to tell people that Eunice is engaged ; that distinction should not be wanting to a cousin of hers. Whoever marries her, by the way, will come into a very good fortune. Almost for the first time, three days ago, she told me about her affairs.

She knows less about them than she believes—I could see that ; but she knows the great matter ; which is, that in the course of her twenty-first year, by the terms of her mother's will she becomes mistress of her property, of which for the last seven years Mr. Caliph has been sole trustee. On that day Mr. Caliph is to make over to her three hundred thousand

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dollars, which he has been nursing and keeping safe. So much on every occasion seems to be expected of this wonderful man ! I call him so because I think it was wonderful of him to have been appointed sole depositary of the property of an orphan by a very anxious, scrupulous, affectionate mother, whose one desire, when she made her will, was to prepare for her child a fruitful majority, and whose acquaintance with him had not been of many years, though her esteem for him was great. He had been a friend—a very good friend—of her husband, who, as he neared his end, asked him to look after his widow. Eunice's father didn't however make him trustee of his little estate ; he put that into other hands, and Eunice has a very good account of it. It amounts, unfortunately, but to some fifty thousand dollars. Her mother's proceedings with regard to Mr. Caliph were very feminine—so I may express myself in the privacy of these pages. But I believe all women are very feminine in their relations with Mr. Caliph. "Haroun-al-Raschid " I call him to Eunice ; and I suppose he expects to find us in a state of Oriental prostration. She says, however, that he is not the least of a Turk, and that nothing could be kinder or more considerate than he was three years ago, before she went to Europe. He was constantly with her at that time, for many months ; and his attentions have evidently made a great impression on her. That sort of thing naturally would, on a girl of seventeen ; and I have told her she must be prepared to think him much less brilliant a personage to-day. I don't know what he will think of some of her plans of expenditure,—laying out an Italian garden at the house on the river, founding a cot at the children's hospital, erecting a music-room in the rear of this house. Next winter Eunice proposes to receive ; but she wishes to have an originality, in the shape of really good music. She

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will evidently be rather extravagant, at least at first. Mr. Caliph of course will have no more authority ; still, he may advise her as a friend.

*April 23.*—This afternoon, while Eunice was out, Mr. Frank made his appearance, having had the civility, as I afterwards learned, to ask for me, in spite of the absence of the *padronina*. I told him she was at Mrs. Ermine's, and that Mrs. Ermine was her cousin.

"Then I can say what I should not be able to say if she were here," he said, smiling that singular smile which has the effect of showing his teeth and drawing the lids of his eyes together. If he were a young countryman, one would call it a grin. It is not exactly a grin, but it is very simple.

"And what may that be?" I asked, with encouragement.

He hesitated a little, while I admired his teeth, which I am sure he has no wish to exhibit ; and I expected something wonderful. "Considering that she is fair, she is really very pretty," he said at last.

I was rather disappointed, and I went so far as to say to him that he might have made that remark in her presence.

This time his blue eyes remained wide open : "So you really think so?"

" 'Considering that she's fair,' that part of it, perhaps, might have been omitted ; but the rest surely would have pleased her."

"Do you really think so?"

"Well, 'really very pretty' is, perhaps, not quite right ; it seems to imply a kind of surprise. You might have omitted the 'really.'"

"You want me to omit everything," he said, laughing, as if he thought me wonderfully amusing.

"The gist of the thing would remain, 'You are

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very pretty ' ; that would have been unexpected and agreeable."

" I think you are laughing at me ! " cried poor Mr. Frank, without bitterness. " I have no right to say that till I know she likes me."

" She does like you ; I see no harm in telling you so." He seemed to me so modest, so natural, that I felt as free to say this to him as I would have been to a good child : more, indeed, than to a good child, for a child to whom one would say that would be rather a prig, and Adrian Frank is not a prig. I could see this by the way he answered ; it was rather odd.

" It will please my brother to know that ! "

" Does he take such an interest in the impressions you make ? "

" Oh yes ; he wants me to appear well." This was said with the most touching innocence ; it was a complete confession of inferiority. It was, perhaps, the tone that made it so ; at any rate, Adrian Frank had renounced the hope of ever appearing as well as his brother. I wonder if a man must be really inferior, to be in such a state of mind as that. He must at all events be very fond of his brother, and even, I think, have sacrificed himself a good deal. This young man asked me ever so many questions about my cousin ; frankly, simply ; as if, when one wanted to know, it was perfectly natural to ask. So it is, I suppose ; but why should he want to know ? Some of his questions were certainly idle. What can it matter to him whether she has one little dog or three, or whether she is an admirer of the music of the future ? " Does she go out much, or does she like a quiet evening at home ? " " Does she like living in Europe, and what part of Europe does she prefer ? " " Has she many relatives in New York, and does she see a great deal of them ? " On all these points I

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was obliged to give Mr. Frank a certain satisfaction ; and after that, I thought I had a right to ask why he wanted to know. He was evidently surprised at being challenged, blushed a good deal, and made me feel for a moment as if I had asked a vulgar question. I saw he had no particular reason ; he only wanted to be civil, and that is the way best known to him of expressing an interest. He was confused ; but he was not so confused that he took his departure. He sat half an hour longer, and let me make up to him by talking very agreeably for the shock I had administered. I may mention here--for I like to see it in black and white--that I *can* talk very agreeably. He listened with the most flattering attention, showing me his blue eyes and his white teeth in alternation, and laughing largely, as if I had a command of the comical. I am not conscious of that. At last after I had paused a little, he said to me, apropos of nothing : " Do you think the realistic school are --a--to be admired ? " Then I saw that he had already forgotten my earlier check--such was the effect of my geniality--and that he would ask me as many questions about myself as I would let him. I answered him freely, but I answered him as I chose. There are certain things about myself I never shall tell, and the simplest way not to tell is to say the contrary. If people are indiscreet, they must take the consequences. I declared that I held the realistic school in horror ; that I found New York the most interesting, the most sympathetic of cities ; and that I thought the American girl the finest result of civilisation. I am sure I convinced him that I am a most remarkable woman. He went away before Eunice returned. He is a charming creature -- a kind of Yankee Donatello. If I could only be his Miriam, the situation would be almost complete, for Eunice is an excellent Hilda.

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*April 26.*—Mrs. Ermine was in great force to-day ; she described all the fine things Eunice can do when she gets her money into her own hands. A set of Mechlin lace, a *rivière* of diamonds which she saw the other day at Tiffany's, a set of Russian sabres that she knows of somewhere else, a little English phaeton with a pair of ponies and a tiger, a family of pugs to waddle about in the drawing-room—all these luxuries Mrs. Ermine declares indispensable. "I should like to know that you have them—it would do me real good," she said to Eunice. "I like to see people with handsome things. It would give me more pleasure to know you have that set of Mechlin than to have it myself. I can't help that—it's the way I am made. If other people have handsome things I see them more ; and then I do want the good of others—I don't care if you think me vain for saying so. I shan't be happy till I see you in an English phaeton. The groom oughtn't to be more than three feet six. I think you ought to show for what you are."

"How do you mean, for what I am?" Eunice asked.

"Well, for a charming girl, with a very handsome fortune."

"I shall never show any more than I do now."

"I will tell you what you do—you show Miss Condit." And Mrs. Ermine presented me her large, foolish face. "If you don't look out, she'll do you up in Morris papers, and then all the Mechlin lace in the world won't matter!"

"I don't follow you at all—I never follow you," I said, wishing I could have sketched her just as she sat there. She was quite grotesque.

"I would rather go without you," she repeated.

"I think that after I come into my property I shall do just as I do now," said Eunice. "After all, where will the difference be? I have to-day

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everything I shall ever have. It's more than enough."

"You won't have to ask Mr. Caliph for everything."

"I ask him for nothing now."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Ermine, "you don't deserve to be rich."

"I am not rich," Eunice remarked.

"Ah, well, if you want a million!"

"I don't want anything," said Eunice.

That's not exactly true. She does want something, but I don't know what it is.

May 2.—Mr. Caliph is really very delightful. He made his appearance to-day and carried everything before him. When I say he carried everything, I mean he carried me; for Eunice had not my prejudices to get over. When I said to her after he had gone, "Your trustee is a very clever man," she only smiled a little, and turned away in silence. I suppose she was amused with the air of importance with which I announced this discovery. Eunice had made it several years ago, and could not be excited about it. I had an idea that some allusion would be made to the way he has neglected her—some apology at least for his long absence. But he did something better than this. He made no definite apology; he only expressed, in his manner, his look, his voice, a tenderness, a charming benevolence, which included and exceeded all apologies. He looks rather tired and preoccupied; he evidently has a great many irons of his own in the fire, and has been thinking these last weeks of larger questions than the susceptibilities of a little girl in New York who happened several years ago to have an exuberant mother. He is thoroughly genial, and is the best talker I have seen since my return. A totally different type from the young Adrian. He is not in the least handsome—is, indeed, rather ugly; but with a fine,

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expressive, pictorial ugliness. He is forty years old, large and stout, may even be pronounced fat ; and there is something about him that I don't know how to describe except by calling it a certain richness. I have seen Italians who have it, but this is the first American. He talks with his eyes, as well as with his lips, and his features are wonderfully mobile. His smile is quick and delightful ; his hands are well-shaped, but distinctly fat ; he has a pale complexion and a magnificent brown beard—the beard of Haroun-al-Raschid. I suppose I must write it very small ; but I have an intimate conviction that he is a Jew, or of Jewish origin. I see that in his plump, white face, of which the tone would please a painter, and which suggests fatigue but is nevertheless all alive ; in his remarkable eye, which is full of old expressions—expressions which linger there from the past, even when they are not active to-day ; in his profile, in his anointed beard, in the very rings on his large pointed fingers. There is not a touch of all this in his stepbrother ; so I suppose the Jewish blood is inherited from his father. I don't think he looks like a gentleman ; he is something apart from all that. If he is not a gentleman, he is not in the least a bourgeois—neither is he of the Bohemian type. In short, as I say, he is a Jew<sup>+</sup> ; and Jews of the upper class have a style of their own. He is very clever, and I think genuinely kind. Nothing could be more charming than his way of talking to Eunice—a certain paternal interest mingled with an air of respectful gallantry (he gives her good advice, and at the same time pays her compliments) ; the whole thing being not in the least overdone. I think he found her changed—"more of a person," as Mrs. Ermine says ; I even think he was a little surprised. She seems slightly afraid of him, which rather surprised me—she was, from her own account, so familiar with him of old. He is decidedly



florid, and was very polite to me ; that was a part of the floridity. He asked if we had seen his step-brother ; begged us to be kind to him and to let him come and see us often. He doesn't know many people in New York, and at that age it is everything (I quote Mr. Caliph) for a young fellow to be at his ease with one or two charming women. " Adrian takes a great deal of knowing ; is horribly shy ; but is most intelligent, and has one of the sweetest natures ! I'm very fond of him—he's all I've got. Unfortunately the poor boy is cursed with a competence. In this country there is nothing for such a young fellow to do ; he hates business, and has absolutely no talent for it. I shall send him back here the next time I see him." Eunice made no answer to this, and, in fact, had little answer to make to most of Mr. Caliph's remarks, only sitting looking at the floor with a smile. I thought it proper therefore to reply that we had found Mr. Frank very pleasant, and hoped he would soon come again. Then I mentioned that the other day I had had a long visit from him alone ; we had talked for an hour, and become excellent friends. Mr. Caliph, as I said this, was leaning forward with his elbow on his knee and his hand uplifted, grasping his thick beard. The other hand, with the elbow out, rested on the other knee ; his head was turned toward me, askance. He looked at me a moment with his deep bright eye—the eye of a much older man than he ; he might have been posing for a water-colour. If I had painted him, it would have been in a high-peaked cap, and an amber-coloured robe, with a wide girdle of pink silk wound many times round his waist, stuck full of knives with jewelled handles. Our eyes met, and we sat there exchanging a glance. I don't know whether he's vain, but I think he must see I appreciate him ; I am sure he understands everything.

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"I like you when you say that," he remarked at the end of a minute.

"I am glad to hear you like me!" This sounds horrid and pert as I relate it.

"I don't like every one," said Mr. Caliph.

"Neither do Eunice and I; do we, Eunice?"

"I am afraid we only try to," she answered, smiling her most beautiful smile.

"Try to? Heaven forbid! I protest against that," I cried. I said to Mr. Caliph that Eunice was too good.

"She comes honestly by that. Your mother was an angel, my child," he said to her.

Cousin Letitia was not an angel, but I have mentioned that Mr. Caliph is florid. "You used to be very good to her," Eunice murmured, raising her eyes to him.

He had got up; he was standing there. He bent his head, smiling like an Italian. "You must be the same, my child."

"What can I do?" Eunice asked.

"You can believe in me—you can trust me."

"I do, Mr. Caliph. Try me and see!"

This was unexpectedly gushing, and I instinctively turned away. Behind my back, I don't know what he did to her—I think it possible he kissed her. When you call a girl "my child," I suppose you may kiss her; but that may be only my bold imagination. When I turned round he had taken up his hat and stick, to say nothing of buttoning a very tightly-fitting coat round a very spacious person, and was ready to offer me his hand in farewell.

"I am so glad you are with her. I am so glad she has a companion so accomplished—so capable."

"So capable of what?" I said, laughing; for the speech was absurd, as he knows nothing about my accomplishments.

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There is nothing solemn about Mr. Caliph ; but he gave me a look which made it appear to me that my levity was in bad taste. Yes, humiliating as it is to write it here, I found myself rebuked by a Jew with fat hands ! “ Capable of advising her well ! ” he said softly.

“ Ah, don’t talk about advice,” Eunice exclaimed. “ Advice always gives an idea of trouble, and I am very much afraid of trouble.”

“ You ought to get married,” he said, with his smile coming back to him.

Eunice coloured and turned away, and I observed—to say something—that this was just what Mrs. Ermine said.

“ Mrs. Ermine ? ah, I hear she’s a charming woman ! ” And shortly after that he went away.

That was almost the only weak thing he said—the only thing for mere form, for of course no one can really think her charming ; least of all a clever man like that. I don’t like Americans to resemble Italians, or Italians to resemble Americans ; but putting that aside, Mr. Caliph is very prepossessing. He is wonderfully good company ; he will spoil us for other people. He made no allusion to business, and no appointment with Eunice for talking over certain matters that are pending ; but I thought of this only half an hour after he had gone. I said nothing to Eunice about it, for she would have noticed the omission herself, and that was enough. The only other point in Mr. Caliph that was open to criticism is his asking Eunice to believe in him—to trust him. Why shouldn’t she, pray ? If that speech was curious—and, strange to say, it almost appeared so—it was incredibly naïf. But this quality is insupposable of Mr. Caliph ; who ever heard of a naïf Jew ? After he had gone I was on the point of saying to Eunice, “ By the way, why did you never mention that he is a Hebrew ? That’s an important

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detail." But an impulse that I am not able to define stopped me, and now I am glad I didn't speak. I don't believe Eunice ever made the discovery, and I don't think she would like it if she did make it. That I should have done so on the instant only proves that I am in the habit of studying the human profile !

*May 9.*—Mrs. Ermine must have discovered that Mr. Caliph has heard she is charming, for she is perpetually coming in here with the hope of meeting him. She appears to think that he comes every day ; for when she misses him, which she has done three times (that is, she arrives just after he goes), she says that if she doesn't catch him on the morrow she will go and call upon him. She is capable of that, I think ; and it makes no difference that he is the busiest of men and she the idlest of women. He has been here four times since his first call, and has the air of wishing to make up for the neglect that preceded it. His manner to Eunice is perfect ; he continues to call her " my child," but in a superficial, impersonal way, as a Catholic priest might do it. He tells us stories of Washington, describes the people there, and makes us wonder whether we should care for K Street and 14½ Street. As yet, to the best of my knowledge, not a word about Eunice's affairs ; he behaves as if he had simply forgotten them. It was, after all, not out of place the other day to ask her to " believe in him " ; the faith wouldn't come as a matter of course. On the other hand he is so pleasant that one would believe in him just to oblige him. He has a great deal of trust-business, and a great deal of law-business of every kind. So at least he says ; we really know very little about him but what he tells us. When I say " we," of course I speak mainly for myself, as I am perpetually forgetting that he is not so new to Eunice as he is to me. She knows what she knows, but I only know what I

see. I have been wondering a good deal what is thought of Mr. Caliph "down-town," as they say here, but without much result, for naturally I can't go down-town and see. The appearance of the thing prevents my asking questions about him; it would be very compromising to Eunice, and make people think that she complains of him—which is so far from being the case. She likes him just as he is, and is apparently quite satisfied. I gather, moreover, that he is thought very brilliant, though a little peculiar, and that he has made a great deal of money. He has a way of his own of doing things, and carries imagination and humour, and a sense of the beautiful, into Wall Street and the Stock Exchange. Mrs. Ermine announced the other day that he is "considered the most fascinating man in New York"; but that is the romantic up-town view of him, and not what I want. His brother has gone out of town for a few days, but he continues to recommend the young Adrian to our hospitality. There is something really touching in his relation to that rather limited young man.

*May 11.*—Mrs. Ermine is in high spirits; she has met Mr. Caliph—I don't know where—and she quite confirms the up-town view. She thinks him the most fascinating man she has ever seen, and she wonders that we should have said so little about him. He is so handsome, so high-bred; his manners are so perfect; he's a regular old dear. I think, of course ill-naturedly, several degrees less well of him since I have heard Mrs. Ermine's impressions. He is not handsome, he is not high-bred, and his manners are not perfect. They are original, and they are expressive; and if one likes him there is an interest in looking for what he will do and say. But if one should happen to dislike him, one would detest his manners and think them familiar and vulgar. As for breeding, he has about him, indeed, the marks of antiquity of race; yet I don't think

Mrs. Ermine would have liked me to say, "Oh yes, all Jews have blood!" Besides, I couldn't before Eunice. Perhaps I consider Eunice too much; perhaps I am betrayed by my old habit of trying to see through millstones; perhaps I interpret things too richly—just as (I know) when I try to paint an old wall I attempt to put in too much "character"; character being in old walls, after all, a finite quantity. At any rate she seems to me rather nervous about Mr. Caliph: that appeared after a little when Mrs. Ermine came back to the subject. She had a great deal to say about the oddity of her never having seen him before, of old, "for after all," as she remarked, "we move in the same society—he moves in the very best." She used to hear Eunice talk about her trustee, but she supposed a trustee must be some horrid old man with a lot of papers in his hand, sitting all day in an office. She never supposed he was a prince in disguise. "We've got a trustee somewhere, only I never see him; my husband does all the business. No wonder he keeps him out of the way if he resembles Mr. Caliph." And then suddenly she said to Eunice, "My dear, why don't you marry him? I should think you would want to." Mrs. Ermine doesn't look through millstones; she contents herself with giving them a poke with her parasol. Eunice coloured, and said she hadn't been asked; she was evidently not pleased with Mrs. Ermine's joke, which was of course as flat as you like. Then she added in a moment—"I should be very sorry to marry Mr. Caliph, even if he were to ask me. I like him, but I don't like him enough for that."

"I should think he would be quite in your style—he's so literary. They say he writes," Mrs. Ermine went on.

"Well, I don't write," Eunice answered, laughing.

"You could if you would try. I'm sure you could

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make a lovely book." Mrs. Ermine's amiability is immense.

"It's safe for you to say that—you never read."

"I have no time," said Mrs. Ermine, "but I like literary conversation. It saves time, when it comes in that way. Mr. Caliph has ever so much."

"He keeps it for you. With us he is very frivolous," I ventured to observe.

"Well, what you call frivolous! I believe you think the prayer-book frivolous."

"Mr. Caliph will never marry any one," Eunice said, after a moment. "That I am very sure of."

Mrs. Ermine stared; there never is so little expression in her face as when she is surprised. But she soon recovered herself. "Don't you believe that! He will take some quiet little woman, after you have all given him up."

Eunice was sitting at the piano, but had wheeled round on the stool when her cousin came in. She turned back to it and struck a few vague chords, as if she were feeling for something. "Please don't speak that way; I don't like it," she said, as she went on playing.

"I will speak any way you like!" Mrs. Ermine cried, with her vacant laugh.

"I think it very low." For Eunice this was severe. "Girls are not always thinking about marriage. They are not always thinking of people like Mr. Caliph—that way."

"They must have changed then, since my time! Wasn't it so in yours, Miss Condit?" She's so stupid that I don't think she meant to make a point.

"I had no 'time,' Mrs. Ermine. I was born an old maid."

"Well, the old maids are the worst. I don't see why it's low to talk about marriage. It's thought

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very respectable to marry. You have only to look round you."

"I don't want to look round me; it's not always so beautiful, what you see," Eunice said, with a small laugh and a good deal of perversity, for a young woman so reasonable.

"I guess you read too much," said Mrs. Ermine, getting up and setting her bonnet-ribbons at the mirror.

"I should think he would hate them!" Eunice exclaimed, striking her chords.

"Hate who?" her cousin asked.

"Oh, all the silly girls."

"Who is 'he,' pray?" This ingenious inquiry was mine.

"Oh, the Grand Turk!" said Eunice, with her voice covered by the sound of her piano. Her piano is a great resource.

May 12.—This afternoon, while we were having our tea, the Grand Turk was ushered in, carrying the most wonderful bouquet of Boston roses that seraglio ever produced. (That image, by the way, is rather mixed; but as I write for myself alone, it may stand.) At the end of ten minutes he asked Eunice if he might see her alone—"on a little matter of business." I instantly rose to leave them, but Eunice said that she would rather talk with him in the library; so she led him off to that apartment. I remained in the drawing-room, saying to myself that I had at last discovered the *fin mot* of Mr. Caliph's peculiarities, which is so very simple that I am a great goose not to have perceived it before. He is a man with a system; and his system is simply to keep business and entertainment perfectly distinct. There may be pleasure for him in his figures, but there are no figures in his pleasure—which has hitherto been to call upon Eunice as a man of the world. To-day he was to be the trustee; I could see it in spite of his bouquet, as



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soon as he came in. The Boston roses didn't contradict that, for the excellent reason that as soon as he had shaken hands with Eunice, who looked at the flowers and not at him, he presented them to Catherine Condit. Eunice then looked at this lady; and as I took the roses I met her eyes, which had a charming light of pleasure. It would be base in me, even in this strictly private record, to suggest that she might possibly have been displeased; but if I cannot say that the expression of her face was lovely without appearing in some degree to point to an ignoble alternative, it is the fault of human nature. Why Mr. Caliph should suddenly think it necessary to offer flowers to Catherine Condit—that is a line of inquiry by itself. As I said some time back, it's a part of his floridity. Besides, any presentation of flowers seems sudden; I don't know why, but it's always rather a *coup de théâtre*. I am writing late at night; they stand on my table, and their fragrance is in the air. I don't say it for the flowers, but no one has ever treated poor Miss Condit with such consistent consideration as Mr. Caliph. Perhaps she is morbid: this is probably the Diary of a Morbid Woman; but in such a matter as that she admires consistency. That little glance of Eunice comes back to me as I write; she is a pure, enchanting soul. Mrs. Ermine came in while she was in the library with Mr. Caliph, and immediately noticed the Boston roses, which effaced all the other flowers in the room.

"Were they sent from her seat?" she asked. Then, before I could answer, "I am going to have some people to dinner to-day; they would look very well in the middle."

"If you wish me to offer them to you, I really can't; I prize them too much."

"Oh, are they yours? Of course you prize them! I don't suppose you have many."

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"These are the first I have ever received—from Mr. Caliph."

"From Mr. Caliph? Did he give them to *you*?" Mrs. Ermine's intonations are not delicate. That "*you*" should be in enormous capitals.

"With his own hand—a quarter of an hour ago." This sounds triumphant, as I write it; but it was no great sensation to triumph over Mrs. Ermine.

She laid down the bouquet, looking almost thoughtful. "He *does* want to marry Eunice," she declared in a moment. This is the region in which, after a flight of fancy, she usually alights. I am sick of the irrepressible verb; just at that moment, however, it was unexpected, and I answered that I didn't understand.

"That's why he gives you flowers," she explained. But the explanation made the matter darker still, and Mrs. Ermine went on: "Isn't there some French proverb about paying one's court to the mother in order to gain the daughter? Eunice is the daughter, and you are the mother."

"And you are the grandmother, I suppose! Do you mean that he wishes me to intercede?"

"I can't imagine why else!" and smiling, with her wide lips, she stared at the flowers.

"At that rate you too will get your bouquet," I said.

"Oh, I have no influence! You ought to do something in return—to offer to paint his portrait."

"I don't offer that, you know; people ask me. Besides, you have spoiled me for common models!"

It strikes me, as I write this, that we had gone rather far—farther than it seemed at the time. We might have gone farther yet, however, if at this moment Eunice had not come back with Mr. Caliph, who appeared to have settled his little matter of business briskly enough. He remained the man of

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business to the end, and, to Mrs. Ermine's evident disappointment, declined to sit down again. He was in a hurry ; he had an engagement.

"Are you going up or down ? I have a carriage at the door," she broke in.

"At Fifty-third Street one is usually going down"; and he gave his peculiar smile, which always seems so much beyond the scope of the words it accompanies. "If you will give me a lift I shall be very grateful."

He went off with her, she being much divided between the prospect of driving with him and her loss of the chance to find out what he had been saying to Eunice. She probably believed he had been proposing to her, and I hope he mystified her well in the carriage.

He had not been proposing to Eunice ; he had given her a cheque, and made her sign some papers. The cheque was for a thousand dollars, but I have no knowledge of the papers. When I took up my abode with her I made up my mind that the only way to preserve an appearance of disinterestedness was to know nothing whatever of the details of her pecuniary affairs. She has a very good little head of her own, and if she shouldn't understand them herself it would be quite out of my power to help her. I don't know why I should care about *appearing* disinterested, when I have in quite sufficient measure the consciousness of being so ; but in point of fact I do, and I value that purity as much as any other. Besides, Mr. Caliph is her supreme adviser, and of course makes everything clear to her. At least I hope he does. I couldn't help saying as much as this to Eunice.

"My dear child, I suppose you understand what you sign. Mr. Caliph ought to be—what shall I call it ?—*crystalline*."

She looked at me with the smile that had come into her face when she saw him give me the flowers. "Oh yes, I think so. If I didn't, it's my own fault.

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He explains everything so beautifully that it's a pleasure to listen. I always read what I sign."

"*Je l'espère bien !*" I said, laughing.

She looked a little grave. "The closing up a trust is very complicated."

"Yours is not closed yet ? It strikes me as very slow."

"Everything can't be done at once. Besides, he has asked for a little delay. Part of my affairs, indeed, are now in my own hands ; otherwise I shouldn't have to sign."

"Is that a usual request—for delay ?"

"Oh yes, perfectly. Besides, I don't want everything in my own control. That is, I want it some day, because I think I ought to accept the responsibilities, as I accept all the pleasures ; but I am not in a hurry. This way is so comfortable, and Mr. Caliph takes so much trouble for me."

"I suppose he has a handsome commission," I said, rather crudely.

"He has no commission at all ; he would never take one."

"In your place, I would much rather he should take one."

"I have asked him to, but he won't !" Eunice said, looking now extremely grave.

Her gravity indeed was so great that it made me smile. "He is wonderfully generous !"

"He is indeed."

"And is it to be indefinitely delayed—the termination of his trust ?"

"Oh no ; only a few months, 'till he gets things into shape,' as he says."

"He has had several years for that, hasn't he ?"

Eunice turned away ; evidently our talk was painful to her. But there was something that vaguely alarmed me in her taking, or at least accepting, the

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sentimental view of Mr. Caliph's services. "I don't think you are kind, Catherine; you seem to suspect him," she remarked, after a little.

"Suspect him of what?"

"Of not wishing to give up the property."

"My dear Eunice, you put things into terrible words! Seriously, I should never think of suspecting him of anything so silly. What could his wishes count for? Is not the thing regulated by law—by the terms of your mother's will? The trust expires of itself at a certain period, doesn't it? Mr. Caliph, surely, has only to act accordingly."

"It is just what he is doing. But there are more papers necessary, and they will not be ready for a few weeks more."

"Don't have too many papers; they are as bad as too few. And take advice of some one else—say of your cousin Ermine, who is so much more sensible than his wife."

"I want no advice," said Eunice, in a tone which showed me that I had said enough. And presently she went on, "I thought you liked Mr. Caliph."

"So I do, immensely. 'He gives beautiful flowers.'"

"Ah, you are horrid!" she murmured.

"Of course I am horrid. That's my business—to be horrid." And I took the liberty of being so again, half an hour later, when she remarked that she must take good care of the cheque Mr. Caliph had brought her, as it would be a good while before she should have another. "Why should it be longer than usual?" I asked. "Is he going to keep your income for himself?"

"I am not to have any till the end of the year—any from the trust, at least. Mr. Caliph has been converting some old houses into shops, so that they will bring more rent. But the alterations have to be paid for—and he takes part of my income to do it."

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"And pray what are you to live on meanwhile?"

"I have enough without that; and I have savings."

"It strikes me as a cool proceeding, all the same."

"He wrote to me about it before we came home, and I thought that way was best."

"I don't think he ought to have asked you," I said.

"As your trustee, he acts in his discretion."

"You are hard to please," Eunice answered.

That is perfectly true; but I rejoined that I couldn't make out whether he consulted her too much or too little. And I don't know that my failure to make it out in the least matters!

May 13.—Mrs. Ermine turned up to-day at an earlier hour than usual, and I saw as soon as she got into the room that she had something to announce. This time it was not an engagement. "He sent me a bouquet—Boston roses—quite as many as yours! They arrived this morning, before I had finished breakfast." This speech was addressed to me, and Mrs. Ermine looked almost brilliant. Eunice scarcely followed her.

"She is talking about Mr. Caliph," I explained.

Eunice stared a moment; then her face melted into a deep little smile. "He seems to give flowers to every one but to me." I could see that this reflexion gave her remarkable pleasure.

"Well, when he gives them, he's thinking of you," said Mrs. Ermine. "He wants to get us on his side."

"On his side?"

"Oh yes; some day he will have need of us!" And Mrs. Ermine tried to look sprightly and insinuating. But she is too utterly *fade*, and I think it is not worth while to talk any more to Eunice just now about her trustee. So, to anticipate Mrs. Ermine, I said to her quickly, but very quietly—

"He sent you flowers simply because you had

taken him into your carriage last night. It was an acknowledgment of your great kindness."

She hesitated a moment. "Possibly. We had a charming drive—ever so far down-town." Then, turning to Eunice, she exclaimed, "My dear, you don't know that man till you have had a drive with him!" When does one know Mrs. Ermine? Every day she is a surprise!

*May 19.*—Adrian Frank has come back to New York, and has been three times at this house—once to dinner, and twice at tea-time. After his brother's strong expression of the hope that we should take an interest in him, Eunice appears to have thought that the least she could do was to ask him to dine. She appears never to have offered this privilege to Mr. Caliph, by the way; I think her view of his cleverness is such that she imagines she knows no one sufficiently brilliant to be invited to meet him. She thought Mrs. Ermine good enough to meet Mr. Frank, and she had also young Woodley—Willie Woodley, as they call him—and Mr. Latrobe. It was not very amusing. Mrs. Ermine made love to Mr. Woodley, who took it serenely, and the dark Latrobe talked to me about the Seventh Regiment—an impossible subject. Mr. Frank made an occasional remark to Eunice, next whom he was placed; but he seemed constrained and frightened, as if he knew that his step-brother had recommended him highly and felt it was impossible to come up to the mark. He is really very modest, it is impossible not to like him. Every now and then he looked at me, with his clear blue eye conscious and expanded, as if to beg me to help him on with Eunice; and then, when I threw in a word, to give their conversation a push, he looked at her in the same way, as if to express the hope that she would not abandon him. There was no danger of this, she only wished to be agreeable to him; but she was nervous and preoccupied, as she

always is when she has people to dinner—she is so afraid they may be bored—and I think that half the time she didn't understand what he said. She told me afterwards that she liked him more even than she liked him at first; that he has, in her opinion, better manners, in spite of his shyness, than any of the young men; and that he must have a nice nature to have such a charming face;—all this she told me, and she added that, notwithstanding all this, there is something in Mr. Adrian Frank that makes her uncomfortable. It is perhaps rather heartless, but after this, when he called two days ago, I went out of the room and left them alone together. The truth is, there is something in this tall, fair, vague, inconsequent youth, who would look like a Prussian lieutenant if Prussian lieutenants ever hesitated, and who is such a singular mixture of confusion and candour—there is something about him that is not altogether to my own taste, and that is why I took the liberty of leaving him. Oddly enough, I don't in the least know what it is; I usually know why I dislike people. I don't dislike the blushing Adrian, however—that is, after all, the oddest part. No, the oddest part of it is that I think I have a feeling of pity for him; that is probably why (if it were not my duty sometimes to remain) I should always depart when he comes. I don't like to see the people I pity; to be pitied by me is too low a depth. Why I should lavish my compassion on Mr. Frank of course passes my comprehension. He is young, intelligent, in perfect health, master of a handsome fortune, and favourite brother of Haroun-al-Raschid. Such are the consequences of being a woman of imagination. When, at dinner, I asked Eunice if he had been as interesting as usual, she said she would leave it to me to judge; he had talked altogether about Miss Condit! He thinks her very attractive! Poor fellow, when it is necessary he doesn't hesitate, though I can't imagine why it



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should be necessary. I think that *au fond* he bores Eunice a little; like many girls of the delicate, sensitive kind, she likes older, more confident men.

May 24.—He has just made me a remarkable communication! This morning I went into the Park in quest of a "bit," with some colours and brushes in a small box, and that wonderfully compressible camp-stool which I can carry in my pocket. I wandered vaguely enough, for half an hour, through the carefully-arranged scenery, the idea of which appears to be to represent the earth's surface *en raccourci*, and at last discovered a small clump of birches which, with their white stems and their little raw green bristles, were not altogether uninspiring. The place was quiet—there were no nurse-maids nor bicycles; so I took up a position and enjoyed an hour's successful work. At last I heard some one say behind me, "I think I ought to tell you I'm looking!" It was Adrian Frank, who had recognised me at a distance, and, without my hearing him, had walked across the grass to where I sat. This time I couldn't leave him, for I hadn't finished my sketch. He sat down near me, on an artistically-preserved rock, and we ended by having a good deal of talk—in which, however, I did the listening, for I can't express myself in two ways at once. What I listened to was this—that Mr. Calph wishes his step-brother to "make up" to Eunice, and that the candid Adrian wishes to know what I think of his chances.

"Are you in love with her?" I asked.

"Oh dear, no! If I were in love with her I should go straight in, without—without this sort of thing."

"You mean without asking people's opinion?"

"Well, yes. Without even asking yours."

I told him that he needn't say "even" mine; for mine would not be worth much. His announcement rather startled me at first, but after I had thought of

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it a little, I found in it a good deal to admire. I have seen so many "arranged" marriages that have been happy, and so many "sympathetic" unions that have been wretched, that the political element doesn't altogether shock me. Of course I can't imagine Eunice making a political marriage, and I said to Mr. Frank, very promptly, that she might consent if she could be induced to love him, but would never be governed in her choice by his advantages. I said "advantages" in order to be polite; the singular number would have served all the purpose. His only advantage is his fortune; for he has neither looks, talents, nor position that would dazzle a girl who is herself clever and rich. This, then, is what Mr. Caliph has had in his head all this while—this is what has made him so anxious that we should like his step-brother. I have an idea that I ought to be rather scandalised, but I feel my pulse and find that I am almost pleased. I don't mean at the idea of her marrying poor Mr. Frank; I mean at such an indication that Mr. Caliph takes an interest in her. I don't know whether it is one of the regular duties of a trustee to provide the trustful with a husband; perhaps in that case his merit may be less. I suppose he has said to himself that if she marries his step-brother she won't marry a worse man. Of course it is possible that he may not have thought of Eunice at all, and may simply have wished the guileless Adrian to do a good thing without regard to Eunice's point of view. I am afraid that even this idea doesn't shock me. Trying to make people marry is, under any circumstances, an unscrupulous game; but the offence is minimised when it is a question of an honest man marrying an angel. Eunice is the angel, and the young Adrian has all the air of being honest. It would, naturally, not be the union of her secret dreams, for the hero of those pure visions would have to be clever and distinguished. Mr. Frank is neither

of these things, but I believe he is perfectly good. Of course he is weak—to come and take a wife simply because his brother has told him to—or is he doing it simply for form, believing that she will never have him, that he consequently doesn't expose himself, and that he will therefore have on easy terms, since he seems to value it, the credit of having obeyed Mr. Caliph? Why he should value it is a matter between themselves, which I am not obliged to know. I don't think I care at all for the relations of men between themselves. Their relations with women are bad enough, but when there is no woman to save it a little—*merci*! I shouldn't think that the young Adrian would care to subject himself to a simple refusal, for it is not gratifying to receive the cold shoulder, even from a woman you don't want to marry. After all, he may want to marry her; there are all sorts of reasons in things. I told him I wouldn't undertake to do anything, and the more I think of it the less I am willing. It would be a weight off my mind to see her comfortably settled in life, beyond the possibility of marrying some highly varnished brute—a fate in certain circumstances quite open to her. She is perfectly capable—with her folded angel's wings—of bestowing herself upon the baker, upon the fish-monger, if she were to take a fancy to him. The clever man of her dreams might beat her or get tired of her; but I am sure that Mr. Frank, if he should pronounce his marriage-vows, would keep them to the letter. From that to pushing her into his arms, however, is a long way. I went so far as to tell him that he had my good wishes; but I made him understand that I can give him no help. He sat for some time *poking* a hole in the earth with his stick and watching the operation. Then he said, with his wide, exaggerated smile—the one thing in his face that recalls his brother, though it is so different—"I think

I should like to try." I felt rather sorry for him, and made him talk of something else; and we separated without his alluding to Eunice, though at the last he looked at me for a moment intently, with something on his lips, which was probably a return to his idea. I stopped him; I told him I always required solitude for my finishing-touches. He thinks me *brusque* and queer, but he went away. I don't know what he means to do; I am curious to see whether he will begin his siege. It can scarcely be said, as yet, to have begun—Eunice, at any rate, is all unconscious.

*June 6.*—Her unconsciousness is being rapidly dispelled; Mr. Frank has been here every day since I last wrote. He is a singular youth, and I don't make him out; I think there is more in him than I supposed at first. He doesn't bore us, and he has become, to a certain extent, one of the family. I like him very much, and he excites my curiosity. I don't quite see where he expects to come out. I mentioned some time back that Eunice had told me he made her uncomfortable; and now, if that continues, she appears to have resigned herself. He has asked her repeatedly to drive with him, and twice she has consented; he has a very pretty pair of horses, and a vehicle that holds but two persons. I told him I could give him no positive help, but I do leave them together. Of course Eunice has noticed this—it is the only intimation I have given her that I am aware of his intentions. I have constantly expected her to say something, but she has said nothing, and it is possible that Mr. Frank is making an impression. He makes love very reasonably; evidently his idea is to be intensely gradual. Of course it isn't gradual to come every day; but he does very little on any one occasion. That, at least, is my impression; for when I talk of his making love I don't mean that I see it.

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When the three of us are together he talks to me quite as much as to her, and there is no difference in his manner from one of us to the other. His shyness is wearing off, and he blushes so much less that I have discovered his natural hue. It has several shades less of crimson than I supposed. I have taken care that he should not see me alone, for I don't wish him to talk to me of what he is doing—I wish to have nothing to say about it. He has looked at me several times in the same way in which he looked just before we parted, that day he found me sketching in the Park; that is, as if he wished to have some special understanding with me. But I don't want a special understanding, and I pretend not to see his looks. I don't exactly see why Eunice doesn't speak to me, and why she expresses no surprise at Mr. Frank's sudden devotion. Perhaps Mr. Caliph has notified her, and she is prepared for everything—prepared even to accept the young Adrian. I have an idea he will be rather taken in if she does. Perhaps the day will come soon when I shall think it well to say, "Take care, take care; you *may* succeed!" He improves on acquaintance; he knows a great many things, and he is a gentleman to his finger-tips. We talk very often about Rome; he has made out every inscription for himself, and has got them all written down in a little book. He brought it the other afternoon and read some of them out to us, and it was more amusing than it may sound. I listen to such things because I can listen to anything about Rome; and Eunice listens possibly because Mr. Caliph has told her to. She appears ready to do anything he tells her; he has been sending her some more papers to sign. He has not been here since the day he gave me the flowers; we went back to Washington shortly after that. She has received several letters from him, accompanying documents that look very

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legal. She has said nothing to me about them, and since I uttered those words of warning which I noted here at the time, I have asked no questions and offered no criticism. Sometimes I wonder whether I myself had not better speak to Mr. Ermine ; it is only the fear of being idiotic and meddlesome that restrains me. It seems to me so odd there should be no one else ; Mr. Caliph appears to have everything in his own hands. We are to go down to our "seat," as Mrs. Ermine says, next week. That brilliant woman has left town herself, like many other people, and is staying with one of her daughters. Then she is going to the other, and then she is coming to Eunice, at Cornerville.

## II

*June 8.*—Late this afternoon—about an hour before dinner—Mr. Frank arrived with what Mrs. Ermine calls his equipage, and asked her to take a short drive with him. At first she declined—said it was too hot, too late, she was too tired ; but he seemed very much in earnest and begged her to think better of it. She consented at last, and when she had left the room to arrange herself, he turned to me with a little grin of elation. I saw he was going to say something about his prospects, and I determined, this time, to give him a chance. Besides, I was curious to know how he believed himself to be getting on. To my surprise, he disappointed my curiosity ; he only said, with his timid brightness, “ I am always so glad when I carry my point.”

“ Your point ? Oh yes. I think I know what you mean.”

“ It’s what I told you that day.” He seemed slightly surprised that I should be in doubt as to whether he had really presented himself as a lover.

“ Do you mean to ask her to marry you ? ”

He stared a little, looking graver. “ Do you mean to-day ? ”

“ Well, yes, to-day, for instance ; you have urged her so to drive.”

“ I don’t think I will do it to-day ; it’s too soon.”

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His gravity was natural enough, I suppose ; but it had suddenly become so intense that the effect was comical, and I could not help laughing. " Very good ; whenever you please."

" Don't you think it's too soon ? " he asked.

" Ah, I know nothing about it."

" I have seen her alone only four or five times."

" You must go on as you think best," I said.

" It's hard to tell. My position is very difficult." And then he began to smile again. He is certainly very odd.

It is my fault, I suppose, that I am too impatient of what I don't understand ; and I don't understand this odd mixture of calculation and passion, or the singular alternation of Mr. Frank's confessions and reserves. " I can't enter into your position," I said ; " I can't advise you or help you in any way." Even to myself my voice sounded a little hard as I spoke, and he was evidently discomposed by it.

He blushed as usual, and fell to putting on his gloves. " I think a great deal of your opinion, and for several days I have wanted to ask you."

" Yes, I have seen that."

" How have you seen it ? "

" By the way you have looked at me."

He hesitated a moment. " Yes, I have looked at you—I know that. There is a great deal in your face to see."

This remark, under the circumstances, struck me as absurd ; I began to laugh again. " You speak of it as if it were a collection of curiosities." He looked away now, he wouldn't meet my eye, and I saw that I had made him feel thoroughly uncomfortable. To lead the conversation back into the commonplace, I asked him where he intended to drive.

" It doesn't matter much where we go—it's so pretty everywhere now." He was evidently not



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thinking of his drive, and suddenly he broke out, "I want to know whether you think she likes me."

"I haven't the least idea. She hasn't told me."

"Do you think she knows that I mean to propose to her?"

"You ought to be able to judge of that better than I."

"I am afraid of taking too much for granted; also of taking her by surprise."

"So that—in her agitation—she might accept you? Is that what you are afraid of?"

"I don't know what makes you say that. I wish her to accept me."

"Are you very sure?"

"Perfectly sure. Why not? She is a charming creature."

"So much the better, then; perhaps she will."

"You don't believe it," he exclaimed, as if it were very clever of him to have discovered that.

"You think too much of what I believe. That has nothing to do with the matter."

"No, I suppose not," said Mr. Frank, apparently wishing very much to agree with me.

"You had better find out as soon as possible from Eunice herself," I added.

"I haven't expected to know—for some time."

"Do you mean for a year or two? She will be ready to tell you before that."

"Oh no—not a year or two; but a few weeks."

"You know you come to the house every day. You ought to explain to her."

"Perhaps I had better not come so often."

"Perhaps not!"

"I like it very much," he said, smiling.

I looked at him a moment; I don't know what he has got in his eyes. "Don't change! You are such a good young man that I don't know what we should

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do without you." And I left him to wait alone for Eunice.

From my window, above, I saw them leave the door ; they make a fair, bright young couple as they sit together. They had not been gone a quarter of an hour when Mr. Caliph's name was brought up to me. He had asked for me—me alone ; he begged that I would do him the favour to see him for ten minutes. I don't know why this announcement should have made me nervous ; but it did. My heart beat at the prospect of entering into direct relations with Mr. Caliph. He is very clever, much thought of, and talked of ; and yet I had vaguely suspected him—of I don't know what ! I became conscious of that, and felt the responsibility of it ; though I didn't foresee, and indeed don't think I foresee yet, any danger of a collision between us. It is to be noted, moreover, that even a woman who is both plain and conceited must feel a certain agitation at entering the presence of Haroun-al-Raschid. I had begun to dress for dinner, and I kept him waiting till I had taken my usual time to finish. I always take some such revenge as that upon men who make me nervous. He is the sort of man who feels immediately whether a woman is well-dressed or not ; but I don't think this reflexion really had much to do with my putting on the freshest of my three little French gowns.

He sat there, watch in hand ; at least he slipped it into his pocket as I came into the room. He was not pleased at having had to wait, and when I apologised, hypocritically, for having kept him, he answered, with a certain dryness, that he had come to transact an important piece of business in a very short space of time. I wondered what his business could be, and whether he had come to confess to me that he had spent Eunice's money for his own purposes. Did he wish me to use my influence with her not to make a

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scandal? He didn't look like a man who has come to ask a favour of that kind; but I am sure that if he ever does ask it he will not look at all as he might be expected to look. He was clad in white garments, from head to foot, in recognition of the hot weather, and he had half-a-dozen roses in his button-hole. This time his flowers were for himself. His white clothes made him look as big as Henry VIII.; but don't tell me he is not a Jew! He's a Jew of the artistic, not of the commercial type; and as I stood there I thought him a very strange person to have as one's trustee. It seemed to me that he would carry such an office into transcendental regions, out of all common jurisdictions; and it was a comfort to me to remember that I have no property to be taken care of. Mr. Caliph kept a pocket-handkerchief, with an enormous monogram, in his large tapering hand, and every other moment he touched his face with it. He evidently suffers from the heat. With all that, *il est bien beau*. His business was not what had at first occurred to me; but I don't know that it was much less strange.

"I knew I should find you alone, because Adrian told me this morning that he meant to come and ask our young friend to drive. I was glad of that; I have been wishing to see you alone, and I didn't know how to manage it."

"You see it's very simple. Didn't you send your brother?" I asked. In another place, to another person, this might have sounded impertinent; but evidently, addressed to Mr. Caliph, things have a special measure, and this I instinctively felt. He will take a great deal, and he will give a great deal. ,

He looked at me a moment, as if he were trying to measure what I would take. "I see you are going to be a very satisfactory person to talk with," he

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answered. "That's exactly what I counted on. I want you to help me."

"I thought there was some reason why Mr. Frank should urge Eunice so to go," I went on ; refreshed a little, I admit, by these words of commendation. "At first she was unwilling."

"Is she usually unwilling—and does he usually have to be urgent?" he asked, like a man pleased to come straight to the point.

"What does it matter, so long as she consents in the end?" I responded, with a smile that made him smile. There is a singular stimulus, even a sort of excitement, in talking with him ; he makes one wish to venture. And this not as women usually venture, because they have a sense of impunity, but, on the contrary, because one has a prevision of penalties—those penalties which give a kind of dignity to sarcasm. He must be a dangerous man to irritate.

"Do you think she will consent, in the end?" he inquired ; and though I had now foreseen what he was coming to, I felt that, even with various precautions, which he had plainly decided not to take, there would still have been a certain crudity in it when, a moment later, he put his errand into words. "I want my little brother to marry her, and I want you to help me bring it about." Then he told me that he knew his brother had already spoken to me, but that he believed I had not promised him much countenance. He wished me to think well of the plan ; it would be a delightful marriage.

"Delightful for your brother, yes. That's what strikes me most."

"Delightful for him, certainly ; but also very pleasant for Eunice, as things go here. Adrian is the best fellow in the world ; he's a gentleman ; he hasn't a vice or a fault ; he is very well educated ; and he has twenty thousand a year. A lovely property."

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"Not in trust?" I said, looking into Mr. Caliph's extraordinary eyes.

"Oh no; he has full control of it. But he is wonderfully careful."

"He doesn't trouble you with it?"

"Oh, dear, no; why should he? Thank God, I haven't got that on my back. His property comes to him from his father, who had nothing to do with me; didn't even like me, I think. He has capital advisers—presidents of banks, overseers of hospitals, and all that sort of thing. They have put him in the way of some excellent investments."

As I write this, I am surprised at my audacity; but, somehow, it didn't seem so great at the time, and he gave absolutely no sign of seeing more in what I said than appeared. He evidently desires the marriage immensely, and he was thinking only of putting it before me so that I too should think well of it; for evidently, like his brother, he has the most exaggerated opinion of my influence with Eunice. On Mr. Frank's part this doesn't surprise me so much; but I confess it seems to me odd that a man of Mr. Caliph's acuteness should make the mistake of taking me for one of those persons who covet influence and like to pull the wires of other people's actions. I have a horror of influence, and should never have consented to come and live with Eunice if I had not seen that she is at bottom much stronger than I, who am not at all strong, in spite of my grand airs. Mr. Caliph, I suppose, cannot conceive of a woman in my dependent position being indifferent to opportunities for working in the dark; but he ought to leave those vulgar imputations to Mrs. Ermine. He ought, with his intelligence, to see one as one is; or do I possibly exaggerate that intelligence? "Do you know I feel as if you were asking me to take part in a conspiracy?" I made that announcement with as little delay as possible.

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He stared a moment, and then he said that he didn't in the least repudiate that view of his proposal. He admitted that he was a conspirator—in an excellent cause. All match-making was conspiracy. It was impossible that as a superior woman I should enter into his ideas, and he was sure that I had seen too much of the world to say anything so *banal* as that the young people were not in love with each other. That was only a basis for marriage when better things were lacking. It was decent, it was fitting, that Eunice should be settled in life ; his conscience would not be at rest about her until he should see that well arranged. He was not in the least afraid of that word “ arrangement ” ; a marriage was an eminently practical matter, and it could not be too much arranged. He confessed that he took the European view. He thought that a young girl's elders ought to see that she marries in a way in which certain definite proprieties are observed. He was sure of his brother ; he knew how faultless Adrian was. He talked for some time, and said a great deal that I had said to myself the other day, after Mr. Frank spoke to me ; said, in particular, very much what I had thought, about the beauty of arrangements—that there are far too few among Americans who marry, that we are the people in the world who divorce and separate most, that there would be much less of this sort of thing if young people were helped to choose ; if marriages were, as one might say, presented to them. I listened to Mr. Caliph with my best attention, thinking it was odd that, on his lips, certain things which I had phrased to myself in very much the same way should sound so differently. They ought to have sounded better, uttered as they were with the energy, the authority, the lucidity, of a man accustomed to making arguments ; but somehow they didn't. I am afraid I am very perverse. I answered—I hardly remember what ; but there was a taint of that perversity in it.

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As he rejoined, I felt that he was growing urgent—very urgent ; he has an immense desire that something may be done. I remember saying at last, “ What I don’t understand is why your brother should wish to marry my cousin. He has told me he is not in love with her. Has your presentation of the idea, as you call it—has that been enough ? Is he acting simply at your request ? ”

I saw that his reply was not perfectly ready, and for a moment those strange eyes of his emitted a ray that I had not seen before. They seemed to say, “ Are you really taking liberties with me ? Be on your guard ; I may be dangerous.” But he always smiles. Yes, I think he is dangerous, though I don’t know exactly what he could do to me. I believe he would smile at the hangman, if he were condemned to meet him. He is very angry with his brother for having admitted to me that the sentiment he entertains for Eunice is not a passion ; as if it would have been possible for him, under my eyes, to pretend that he is in love ! I don’t think I am afraid of Mr. Caliph ; I don’t desire to take liberties with him (as his eyes seemed to call it) or with any one ; but, decidedly, I am not afraid of him. If it came to protecting Eunice, for instance ; to demanding justice—— But what extravagances am I writing ? He answered, in a moment, with a good deal of dignity, and even a good deal of reason, that his brother has the greatest admiration for my cousin, that he agrees fully and cordially with everything he (Mr. Caliph) has said to him about its being an excellent match, that he wants very much to marry, and wants to marry as a gentleman should. If he is not in love with Eunice, moreover, he is not in love with any one else.

“ I hope not ! ” I said, with a laugh ; whereupon Mr. Caliph got up, looking, for him, rather grave.

“ I can’t imagine why you should suppose that

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Adrian is not acting freely. I don't know what you imagine my means of coercion to be."

"I don't imagine anything. I think I only wish he had thought of it himself."

"He would never think of anything that is for his good. He is not in the least interested."

"Well, I don't know that it matters, because I don't think Eunice will see it—as we see it."

"Thank you for saying 'we.' Is she in love with some one else?"

"Not that I know of; but she may expect to be, some day. And better than that, she may expect—very justly—some one to be in love with her."

"Oh, in love with her! How you women talk! You all of you want the moon. If she is not content to be thought of as Adrian thinks of her, she is a very silly girl. What will she have more than tenderness? That boy is all tenderness."

"Perhaps he is too tender," I suggested. "I think he is afraid to ask her."

"Yes, I know he is nervous—at the idea of a refusal. But I should like her to refuse him once."

"It is not of that he is afraid—it is of her accepting him."

Mr. Caliph smiled, as if he thought this very ingenious. "You don't understand him. I'm so sorry! I had an idea that—with your knowledge of human nature, your powers of observation—you would have perceived how he is made. In fact, I rather counted on that." He said this with a little tone of injury which might have made me feel terribly inadequate if it had not been accompanied with a glance that seemed to say that, after all, he was generous and he forgave me. "Adrian's is one of those natures that are inflamed by not succeeding. He doesn't give up; he thrives on opposition. If she refuses him three or four times he will adore her!"



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"She is sure then to be adored—though I am not sure it will make a difference with her. I haven't yet seen a sign that she cares for him."

"Why then does she go out to drive with him?" There was nothing brutal in the elation with which Mr. Caliph made this point; still, he looked a little as if he pitied me for exposing myself to a refutation so prompt.

"That proves nothing, I think. I would go to drive with Mr. Frank, if he should ask me, and I should be very much surprised if it were regarded as an intimation that I am ready to marry him."

Mr. Caliph had his hands resting on his thighs, and in this position, bending forward a little, with his smile he said, "Ah, but he doesn't want to marry *you*!"

That was a little brutal, I think; but I should have appeared ridiculous if I had attempted to resent it. I simply answered that I had as yet seen no sign even that Eunice is conscious of Mr. Frank's intentions. I think she is, but I don't think so from anything she has said or done. Mr. Caliph maintains that she is capable of going for six months without betraying herself, all the while quietly considering and making up her mind. It is possible he is right—he has known her longer than I. He is far from wishing to wait for six months, however; and the part I must play is to bring matters to a crisis. I told him that I didn't see why he did not speak to her directly—why he should operate in this roundabout way. Why shouldn't he say to her all that he had said to me—tell her that she would make him very happy by marrying his little brother? He answered that this is impossible, that the nearness of relationship would make it unbecoming; it would look like a kind of nepotism. The thing must appear to come to pass of itself—and I, somehow, must be the author of that appearance! I was too much a woman

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of the world, too acquainted with life, not to see the force of all this. He had a great deal to say about my being a woman of the world ; in one sense it is not all complimentary ; one would think me some battered old dowager who had married off fifteen daughters. I feel that I am far from all that when Mr. Caliph leaves me so mystified. He has some other reason for wishing these nuptials than love of the two young people, but I am unable to put my hand on it. Like the children at hide-and-seek, however, I think I "burn." I don't like him, I mistrust him ; but he is a very charming man. His geniality, his richness, his magnetism, I suppose I should say, are extraordinary ; he fascinates me, in spite of my suspicions. The truth is, that in his way he is an artist, and in my little way I am also one ; and the artist in me recognises the artist in him, and cannot quite resist the temptation to foregather. What is more than this, the artist in him has recognised the artist in me—it is very good of him—and would like to establish a certain freemasonry. "Let us take together the artistic view of life" ; that is simply the meaning of his talking so much about my being a woman of the world. That is all very well ; but it seems to me there would be a certain baseness in our being artists together at the expense of poor little Eunice. I should like to know some of Mr. Caliph's secrets, but I don't wish to give him any of mine in return for them. Yet I gave him something before he departed ; I hardly know what, and hardly know how he extracted it from me. It was a sort of promise that I would after all speak to Eunice,— "as I should like to have you, you know." He remained there for a quarter of an hour after he got up to go ; walking about the room with his hands on his hips ; talking, arguing, laughing, holding me with his eyes, his admirable face—as natural, as dramatic, and at the same time as diplomatic, as an Italian. I am pretty

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sure he was trying to produce a certain effect, to entangle, to magnetise me. Strange to say, Mr. Caliph compromises himself, but he doesn't compromise his brother. He has a private reason, but his brother has nothing to do with his privacies. That was my last word to him.

"The moment I feel sure that I may do something for your brother's happiness—your brother's alone—by pleading his cause with Eunice—that moment I will speak to her. But I can do nothing for yours."

In answer to this, Mr. Caliph said something very unexpected. "I wish I had known you five years ago!"

There are many meanings to that; perhaps he would have liked to put me out of the way. But I could take only the polite meaning. "Our acquaintance could never have begun too soon."

"Yes, I should have liked to know you," he went on, "in spite of the fact that you are not kind, that you are not just. Have I asked you to do anything for my happiness? My happiness is nothing. I have nothing to do with happiness. I don't deserve it. It is only for my little brother—and for your charming cousin."

I was obliged to admit that he was right; that he had asked nothing for himself. "But I don't want to do anything for you even by accident!" I said—laughing, of course.

This time he was grave. He stood looking at me a moment, then put out his hand. "Yes, I wish I had known you!"

There was something so expressive in his voice, so handsome in his face, so tender and respectful in his manner, as he said this, that for an instant I was really moved, and I was on the point of saying with feeling, "I wish indeed you had!" But that instinct of which I have already spoken checked me—the sense that somehow, as things stand, there can be no

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*rapprochement* between Mr. Caliph and me that will not involve a certain sacrifice of Eunice. So I only replied, "You seem to me strange, Mr. Caliph. I must tell you that I don't understand you."

He kept my hand, still looking at me, and went on as if he had not heard me. "I am not happy—I am not wise nor good." Then suddenly, in quite a different tone, "For God's sake, let her marry my brother!"

There was a quick passion in these words which made me say, "If it is so pressing as that, you certainly ought to speak to her. Perhaps she'll do it to oblige you!"

We had walked into the hall together, and the last I saw of him he stood in the open doorway, looking back at me with his smile. "Hang the nepotism! I *will* speak to her!"

*Cornerville, July 6.*—A whole month has passed since I have made an entry; but I have a good excuse for this dreadful gap. Since we have been in the country I have found subjects enough and to spare, and I have been painting so hard that my hand, of an evening, has been glad to rest. This place is very lovely, and the Hudson is as beautiful as the Rhine. There are the words, in black and white, over my signature; I can't do more than that. I have said it a dozen times, in answer to as many challenges, and now I record the opinion with all the solemnity I can give it. May it serve for the rest of the summer! This is an excellent old house, of the style that was thought impressive, in this country, forty years ago. It is painted a cheerful slate-colour, save for a multitude of pilasters and facings which are picked out in the cleanest and freshest white. It has a kind of clumsy gable or apex, on top; a sort of roofed terrace, below, from which you may descend to a lawn dotted with delightful old trees; and between the two, in the

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second story, a deep verandah, let into the body of the building, and ornamented with white balustrades, considerably carved, and big blue stone jars. Add to this a multitude of green shutters and striped awnings, and a mass of Virginia creepers and wisterias, and fling over it the lavish light of the American summer, and you have a notion of some of the conditions of our *villeggiatura*. The great condition, of course, is the splendid river, lying beneath our rounded headland in vast silvery stretches and growing almost vague on the opposite shore. It is a country of views ; you are always peeping down an avenue, or ascending a mound, or going round a corner, to look at one. They are rather too shining, too high-pitched, for my little purposes ; all nature seems glazed with light and varnished with freshness. But I manage to scrape something off. Mrs. Ermine is here, as brilliant as her setting ; and so, strange to say, is Adrian Frank. Strange, for this reason, that the night before we left town I went into Eunice's room and asked her whether she knew, or rather whether she suspected, what was going on. A sudden impulse came to me ; it seemed to me unnatural that in such a situation I should keep anything from her. I don't want to interfere, but I think I want even less to carry too far my aversion to interference, and without pretending to advise Eunice, it was revealed to me that she ought to know that Mr. Caliph had come to see me on purpose to induce me to work upon her. It was not till after he was gone that it occurred to me he had sent his brother in advance, on purpose to get Eunice out of the way, and that this was the reason the young Adrian would take no refusal. He was really in excellent training. It was a very hot night. Eunice was alone in her room, without a lamp ; the windows were wide open, and the dusk was clarified by the light of the street. She sat there,

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among things vaguely visible, in a white wrapper, with her fair hair on her shoulders, and I could see her eyes move toward me when I asked her whether she knew that Mr. Frank wished to marry her. I could see her smile, too, as she answered that she knew he thought he did, but also knew he didn't.

"Of course I have only his word for it," I said.

"Has he told you?"

"Oh yes, and his brother too."

"His brother?" And Eunice slowly got up.

"It's an idea of Mr. Caliph's as well. Indeed, Mr. Caliph may have been the first. He came here to-day, while you were out, to tell me how much he should like to see it come to pass. He has set his heart upon it, and he wished me to engage to do all in my power to bring it about. Of course I can't do anything, can I?"

She had sunk into her chair again as I went on; she sat there looking before her, in the dark. Before she answered me she gathered up her thick hair with her hands, twisted it together, and holding it in place, on top of her head, with one hand, tried to fasten a comb into it with the other. I passed behind her to help her; I could see she was agitated. "Oh no, you can't do anything," she said, after a moment, with a laugh that was not like her usual laughter. "I know all about it; they have told me, of course." Her tone was forced, and I could see that she had not really known all about it—had not known that Mr. Caliph is pushing his brother. I went to the window and looked out a little into the hot, empty street, where the gas lamps showed me, up and down, the hundred high stoops, exactly alike, and as ugly as a bad dream. While I stood there a thought suddenly dropped into my mind, which has lain ever since where it fell. But I don't wish to move it, even to write it here. I stayed with Eunice for ten minutes; I told her

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everything that Mr. Caliph had said to me. She listened in perfect silence—I could see that she was glad to listen. When I related that he didn't wish to speak to her himself on behalf of his brother, because that would seem indelicate, she broke in, with a certain eagerness, "Yes, that is very natural!"

"And now you can marry Mr. Frank without my help!" I said, when I had done.

She shook her head sadly, though she was smiling again. "It's too late for your help. He has asked me to marry him, and I have told him he can hope for it—never!"

I was surprised to hear he had spoken, and she said nothing about the time or place. It must have been that afternoon, during their drive. I said that I was rather sorry for our poor young friend, he was such a very nice fellow. She agreed that he was remarkably nice, but added that this was not a sufficient reason for her marrying him; and when I said that he would try again, that I had Mr. Caliph's assurance that he would not be easy to get rid of, and that a refusal would only make him persist, she answered that he might try as often as he liked; he was so little disagreeable to her that she would take even that from him. And now, to give him a chance to try again, she has asked him down here to stay, thinking apparently that Mrs. Ermine's presence puts us *en règle* with the proprieties. I should add that she assured me there was no real danger of his trying again; he had told her he meant to, but he had said it only for form. Why should he, since he was not in love with her? It was all an idea of his brother's, and she was much obliged to Mr. Caliph, who took his duties much too seriously and was not in the least bound to provide her with a husband. Mr. Frank and she had agreed to remain friends, as if nothing had happened; and I think she then said something about her intending to

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ask him to this place. A few days after we got here, at all events, she told me that she had written to him, proposing his coming ; whereupon I intimated that I thought it a singular overture to make to a rejected lover whom one didn't wish to encourage. He would take it as encouragement, or at all events Mr. Caliph would. She answered that she didn't care what Mr. Caliph thinks, and that she knew Mr. Frank better than I, and knew therefore that he had absolutely no hope. But she had a particular reason for wishing him to be here. That sounded mysterious, and she couldn't tell me more ; but in a month or two I would guess her reason. As she said this she looked at me with a brighter smile than she has had for weeks ; for I protest that she is troubled—Eunice is greatly troubled. Nearly a month has elapsed, and I haven't guessed that reason. Here is Adrian Frank, at any rate, as I say ; and I can't make out whether he persists or renounces. His manner to Eunice is just the same ; he is always polite and always shy, never inattentive and never unmistakable. He has not said a word more to me about his suit. Apart from this he is very sympathetic, and we sit about sketching together in the most fraternal manner. He made to me a day or two since a very pretty remark ; viz., that he would rather copy a sketch of mine than try, himself, to do the place from nature. This perhaps does not look so *galant* as I repeat it here ; but with the tone and glance with which he said it, it really almost touched me. I was glad, by the way, to hear from Eunice the night before we left town that she doesn't care what Mr. Caliph thinks ; only, I should be gladder still if I believed it. I don't, unfortunately ; among other reasons, because it doesn't at all agree with that idea which descended upon me with a single jump—from heaven knows where—while I looked out of her window at the stoops. I observe with pleasure, how-



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ever, that he doesn't send her any more papers to sign. These days pass softly, quickly, but with a curious, an unnatural, stillness. It is as if there were something in the air—a sort of listening hush. That sounds very fantastic, and I suppose such remarks are only to be justified by my having the artistic temperament—that is, if I have it! If I haven't, there is no excuse; unless it be that Eunice is distinctly uneasy, and that it takes the form of a voluntary, exaggerated calm, of which I feel the contact, the tension. She is as quiet as a mouse and yet as restless as a flame. She is neither well nor happy; she doesn't sleep. It is true that I asked Mr. Frank the other day what impression she made on him, and he replied, with a little start, and a smile of alacrity, "Oh, delightful, as usual!"—so that I saw he didn't know what he was talking about. He is tremendously sunburnt, and as red as a tomato. I wish he would look a little less at my daubs and a little more at the woman he wishes to marry. In summer I always suffice to myself, and I am so much interested in my work that if I hope, devoutly, as I do, that nothing is going to happen to Eunice, it is probably quite as much from selfish motives as from others. If anything were to happen to her I should be immensely interrupted. Mrs. Ermine is bored, *par exemple*! She is dying to have a garden-party, at which she can drag a long train over the lawn; but day follows day and this entertainment does not take place. Eunice has promised it, however, for another week, and I believe means to send out invitations immediately. Mrs. Ermine has offered to write them all; she has, after all, *du bon*. But the fatuity of her misunderstandings of everything that surrounds her passes belief. She sees nothing that really occurs, and gazes complacently into the void. Her theory is always that Mr. Caliph is in love with Eunice,—she opened up to me on the subject only

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yesterday, because with no one else to talk to but the young Adrian, who dodges her, she doesn't in the least mind that she hates me, and that I think her a goose—that Mr. Caliph is in love with Eunice, but that Eunice, who is queer enough for anything, doesn't like him, so that he has sent down his step-brother to tell stories about the good things he has done, and to win over her mind to a more favourable view. Mrs. Ermine believes in these good things, and appears to think such action on Mr. Caliph's part both politic and dramatic. She has not the smallest suspicion of the real little drama that has been going on under her nose. I wish I had that absence of vision ; it would be a great rest. Heaven knows I see more than I want—for instance when I see that my poor little cousin is pinched with pain, and yet that I can't relieve her, can't even advise her. I couldn't do the former even if I would, and she wouldn't let me do the latter even if I could. It seems too pitiful, too incredible, that there should be no one to turn to. Surely, if I go up to town for a day next week, as seems probable, I may call upon William Ermine. Whether I *may* or not, I will.

*July 11.*—She has been getting letters, and they have made her worse. Last night I spoke to her—I asked her to come into my room. I told her that I saw she was in distress ; that it was terrible to me to see it ; that I was sure that she has some miserable secret. Who was making her suffer this way ? No one had the right—not even Mr. Caliph, if Mr. Caliph it was, to whom she appeared to have conceded every right. She broke down completely, burst into tears, confessed that she is troubled about money. Mr. Caliph has again requested a delay as to his handing in his accounts, and has told her that she will have no income for another year. She thinks it strange ; she is afraid that everything isn't right. She is not afraid of being

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poor ; she holds that it's vile to concern one's self so much about money. But there is something that breaks her heart in thinking that Mr. Caliph should be in fault. She had always admired him, she had always believed in him, she had always—— What it was, in the third place, that she had always done I didn't learn, for at this point she buried her head still deeper in my lap and sobbed for half an hour. Her grief was melting. I was never more troubled, and this in spite of the fact that I was furious at her strange air of acceptance of a probable calamity. She is afraid that everything isn't right, forsooth ! I should think it was not, and should think it hadn't been for heaven knows how long. This is what has been in the air ; this is what was hanging over us. But Eunice is simply amazing. She declines to see a lawyer ; declines to hold Mr. Caliph accountable ; declines to complain, to inquire, to investigate in any way. I am sick—I am terribly perplexed—I don't know what to do. Her tears dried up in an instant as soon as I made the very obvious remark that the beautiful, the mysterious, the captivating Caliph is no better than a common swindler ; and she gave me a look which might have frozen me if, when I am angry, I were freezable. She took it *de bien haut* ; she intimated to me that if I should ever speak in that way again of Mr. Caliph we must part company for ever. She was distressed ; she admitted that she felt injured. I had seen for myself how far that went. But she didn't pretend to judge him. He had been in trouble,—he had told her that ; and his trouble was worse than hers, inasmuch as his honour was at stake, and it had to be saved.

“ It's charming to hear you speak of his honour,” I cried, quite regardless of the threat she had just uttered. “ Where was his honour when he violated the most sacred of trusts ? Where was his honour

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when he went off with your fortune? Those are questions, my dear, that the courts will make him answer. He shall make up to you every penny that he has stolen, or my name is not Catherine Condit!"

Eunice gave me another look, which seemed meant to let me know that I had suddenly become in her eyes the most indecent of women; and then she swept out of the room. I immediately sat down and wrote to Mr. Ermine, in order to have my note ready to send up to town at the earliest hour the next morning. I told him that Eunice was in dreadful trouble about her money-matters, and that I believed he would render her a great service, though she herself had no wish to ask it, by coming down to see her at his first convenience. I reflected, of course, as I wrote, that he could do her no good if she should refuse to see him; but I made up for this by saying to myself that I at least should see him, and that he would do me good. I added in my note that Eunice had been despoiled by those who had charge of her property; but I didn't mention Mr. Caliph's name. I was just closing my letter when Eunice came into my room again. I saw in a moment that she was different from anything she had ever been before—or at least had ever seemed. Her excitement, her passion, had gone down; even the traces of her tears had vanished. She was perfectly quiet, but all her softness had left her. She was as solemn and impersonal as the priestess of a cult. As soon as her eyes fell upon my letter she asked me to be so good as to inform her to whom I had been writing. I instantly satisfied her, telling her what I had written; and she asked me to give her the document. "I must let you know that I shall immediately burn it up," she added; and she went on to say that if I should send it to Mr. Ermine she herself would write to him by the same post that he was to heed nothing I had said. I tore up my letter,

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but I announced to Eunice that I would go up to town and see the person to whom I had addressed it. "That brings us precisely to what I came in to say," she answered; and she proceeded to demand of me a solemn vow that I would never speak to a living soul of what I had learned in regard to her affairs. They were her affairs exclusively, and no business of mine or of any other human being; and she had a perfect right to ask and to expect this promise. She has, indeed—more's the pity; but it was impossible to me to admit just then—indignant and excited as I was—that I recognised the right. I did so at last, however, and I made the promise. It seems strange to me to write it here; but I am pledged by a tremendous vow, taken in this "intimate" spot, in the small hours of the morning, never to lift a finger, never to speak a word, to redress any wrong that Eunice may have received at the hands of her treacherous trustee, to bring it to the knowledge of others, or to invoke justice, compensation, or pity. How she extorted this concession from me is more than I can say: she did so by the force of her will, which, as I have already had occasion to note, is far stronger than mine; and by the vividness of her passion, which is none the less intense because it burns inward and makes her heart glow while her face remains as clear as an angel's. She seated herself with folded hands, and declared she wouldn't leave the room until I had satisfied her. She is in a state of extraordinary exaltation, and from her own point of view she was eloquent enough. She returned again and again to the fact that she did not judge Mr. Caliph; that what he may have done is between herself and him alone; and that if she had not been betrayed to speaking of it to me in the first shock of finding that certain allowances would have to be made for him, no one need ever have suspected it. She was now perfectly ready to make those allowances.

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She was unspeakably sorry for Mr. Caliph. He had been in urgent need of money, and he had used hers : pray, whose else would I have wished him to use ? Her money had been an insupportable bore to him from the day it was thrust into his hands. To make him her trustee had been in the worst possible taste ; he was not the sort of person to make a convenience of, and it had been odious to take advantage of his good nature. She had always been ashamed of owing him so much. He had been perfect in all his relations with her, though he must have hated her and her wretched little investments from the first. If she had lost money, it was not his fault ; he had lost a great deal more for himself than he had lost for her. He was the kindest, the most delightful, the most interesting of men. Eunice brought out all this with pure defiance ; she had never treated herself before to the luxury of saying it, and it was singular to think that she found her first pretext, her first boldness, in the fact that he had ruined her. All this looks almost grotesque as I write it here ; but she imposed it upon me last night with all the authority of her passionate little person. I agreed, as I say, that the matter was none of my business ; that is now definite enough. Two other things are equally so. One is that she is to be plucked like a chicken ; the other is that she is in love with the precious Caliph, and has been so for years ! I didn't dare to write that the other night, after the beautiful idea had suddenly flowered in my mind ; but I don't care what I write now. I am so horribly tongue-tied that I must at least relieve myself here. Of course I wonder now that I never guessed her secret before ; especially as I was perpetually hovering on the edge of it. It explains many things, and it is very terrible. In love with a pickpocket ! *Merçi !* I am glad fate hasn't played me that trick.

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*July 14.*—I can't get over the idea that he is to go scot-free. I grind my teeth at it as I sit at work, and I find myself using the most livid, the most indignant colours. I have had another talk with Eunice, but I don't in the least know what she is to live on. She says she has always her father's property, and that this will be abundant ; but that of course she cannot pretend to live as she has lived hitherto. She will have to go abroad again and economise ; and she will probably have to sell this place—that is, if she can. " If she can " of course means if there is anything to sell ; if it isn't devoured with mortgages. What I want to know is, whether Justice, in such a case as this, will not step in, notwithstanding the silence of the victim. If I could only give her a hint—the angel of the scales and sword—in spite of my detestable promise ! I can't find out about Mr. Caliph's impunity, as it is impossible for me to allude to the matter to any one who would be able to tell me. Yes, the more I think of it the more reason I see to rejoice that fate hasn't played me that trick of making me fall in love with a common thief ! Suffering keener than my poor little cousin's I cannot possibly imagine, or a power of self-sacrifice more awful. Fancy the situation, when the only thing one can do for the man one loves is to forgive him for stealing ! What a delicate attention, what a touching proof of tenderness ! This Eunice can do ; she has waited all these years to do something. I hope she is pleased with her opportunity. And yet when I say she has forgiven him for stealing, I lose myself in the mystery of her exquisite spirit. Who knows what it is she has forgiven—does she even know herself ? She consents to being injured, despoiled, and finds in consenting a kind of rapture. But I notice that she has said no more about Mr. Caliph's honour. That substantive she condemns herself never

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to hear again without a quiver, for she has condoned something too ignoble. What I further want to know is, what conceivable tone he has taken—whether he has made a clean breast of it, and thrown himself upon her mercy ; or whether he has sought refuge in bravado, in prevarication ? Not indeed that it matters, save for the spectacle of the thing, which I find rich. I should also like much to know whether everything has gone, whether something may yet be saved. It is safe to say that she doesn't know the worst, and that if he has admitted the case is bad, we may take for granted that it leaves nothing to be desired. Let him alone to do the thing handsomely ! I have a right to be violent, for there was a moment when he made me like him, and I feel as if he had cheated me too. Her being in love with him makes it perfect ; for of course it was in that that he saw his opportunity to fleece her. I don't pretend to say how he discovered it, for she has watched herself as a culprit watches a judge ; but from the moment he guessed it he must have seen that he could do what he liked. It is true that this doesn't agree very well with his plan that she should marry his step-brother ; but I prefer to believe it, because it makes him more horrible. And apropos of Adrian Frank, it is very well I like *him* so much (that comes out rather plump, by the way), inasmuch as if I didn't it would be quite open to me to believe that he is in league with Caliph. There has been nothing to prove that he has not said to his step-brother, " Very good ; you take all you can get, and I will marry her, and being her husband, hush it up,"—nothing but the expression of his blue eyes. That is very little, when we think that expressions and eyes are a specialty of the family, and haven't prevented Mr. Caliph from being a robber. It is those eyes of his that poor Eunice is in love with, and it



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is for their sake that she forgives him. But the young Adrian's are totally different, and not nearly so fine, which I think a great point in his favour. Mr. Caliph's are southern eyes, and the young Adrian's are eyes of the north. Moreover, though he is so amiable and obliging, I don't think he is amiable enough to *endosser* his brother's victims to that extent, even to save his brother's honour. He needn't care so much about that honour, since Mr. Caliph's name is not his name. And then, poor fellow, he is too stupid ; he is almost as stupid as Mrs. Ermine. The two have sat together directing cards for Eunice's garden-party as placidly as if no one had a sorrow in life. Mrs. Ermine proposed this pastime to Mr. Frank ; and as he has nothing in the world to do, it is as good an employment for him as another. But it exasperates me to see him sitting at the big table in the library, opposite to Mrs. E., while they solemnly pile one envelope on top of another. They have already a heap as high as their heads ; they must have invited a thousand people. I can't imagine who they all are. It is an extraordinary time for Eunice to be giving a party—the day after she discovers that she is penniless ; but of course it isn't Eunice, it's Mrs. Ermine. I said to her yesterday that if she was to change her mode of life—simple enough already, poor thing—she had better begin at once ; and that her garden-party under Mrs. Ermine's direction would cost her a thousand dollars. She answered that she must go on, since it had already been talked about ; she wished no one to know anything—to suspect anything. This would be her last extravagance, her farewell to society. If such resources were open to us poor heretics, I should suppose she meant to go into a convent. She exasperates me too—every one exasperates me. It is some satisfaction, however, to feel that my exasperation

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clears up my mind. It is Caliph who is "sold," after all. He would not have invented this alliance for his brother if he had known—if he had faintly suspected—that Eunice was in love with him, inasmuch as in this case he had assured impunity. Fancy his not knowing it—the idiot !

*July 10.*—They are still directing cards, and Mrs. Ermine has taken the whole thing on her shoulders. She has invited people that Eunice has never heard of—a pretty rabble she will have made of it ! She has ordered a band of music from New York, and a new dress for the occasion—something in the last degree *champêtre*. Eunice is perfectly indifferent to what she does ; I have discovered that she is thinking only of one thing. Mr. Caliph is coming, and the bliss of that idea fills her mind. The more people the better ; she will not have the air of making petty economies to afflict him with the sight of what he has reduced her to !

" This is the way Eunice ought to live," Mrs. Ermine said to me this afternoon, rubbing her hands, after the last invitation had departed. When I say the last, I mean the last, till she had remembered another that was highly important, and had floated back into the library to scribble it off. She writes a regular invitation-hand—a vague, sloping, silly hand, that looks as if it had done nothing all its days but write, "Mr. and Mrs. Ermine request the pleasure"; or, "Mr. and Mrs. Ermine are delighted to accept." She told me that she knew Eunice far better than Eunice knew herself, and that her line in life was evidently to "receive." No one better than she would stand in a doorway and put out her hand with a smile ; no one would be a more gracious and affable hostess, or make a more generous use of an ample fortune. She is really very trying, Mrs. Ermine, with her ample fortune ; she is like a clock striking impossible hours. I think she

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must have engaged a special train for her guests—a train to pick up people up and down the river. Adrian Frank went to town to-day ; he comes back on the 23rd, and the festival takes place the next day. The festival,—Heaven help us ! Eunice is evidently going to be ill ; it's as much as I can do to keep from adding that it serves her right ! ' It's a great relief to me that Mr. Frank has gone ; this has ceased to be a place for him. It is ever so long since he has said anything to me about his " prospects." They are charming, his prospects !

*July 26.*—The garden-party has taken place, and a great deal more besides. I have been too agitated, too fatigued and bewildered, to write anything here ; but I can't sleep to-night—I'm too nervous—and it is better to sit and scribble than to toss about. I may as well say at once that the party was very pretty—Mrs. Ermine may have that credit. The day was lovely ; the lawn was in capital order ; the music was good, and the *buffet* apparently inexhaustible. There was an immense number of people ; some of them had come even from Albany—many of them strangers to Eunice, and protégés only of Mrs. Ermine ; but they dispersed themselves on the grounds, and I have not heard as yet that they stole the spoons or plucked up the plants. Mrs. Ermine, who was exceedingly *champêtre*—white muslin and corn-flowers—told me that Eunice was " receiving adorably," was in her native element. She evidently inspired great curiosity ; that was why every one had come. I don't mean because every one suspects her situation, but because as yet, since her return, she has been little seen and known, and is supposed to be a distinguished figure—clever, beautiful, rich, and a *parti*. I think she satisfied every one ; she was voted most interesting, and except that she was deadly pale, she was prettier than any one else. Adrian Frank did not come back

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on the 23rd, and did not arrive for the festival. So much I note without as yet understanding it. His absence from the garden-party, after all his exertions under the orders of Mrs. Ermine, is in need of an explanation. Mr. Caliph could give none, for Mr. Caliph was there. He professed surprise at not finding his brother ; said he had not seen him in town, that he had no idea what had become of him. This is probably perfectly false. I am bound to believe that everything he says and does is false ; and I have no doubt that they met in New York, and that Adrian told him his reason—whatever it was—for not coming back. I don't know how to relate what took place between Mr. Caliph and me ; we had an extraordinary scene—a scene that gave my nerves the shaking from which they have not recovered. He is truly a most amazing personage. He is altogether beyond me ; I don't pretend to fathom him. To say that he has no moral sense is nothing. I have seen other people who have had no moral sense ; but I have seen no one with that impudence, that cynicism, that remorseless cruelty. We had a tremendous encounter ; I thank heaven that strength was given me ! When I found myself face to face with him, and it came over me that, blooming there in his diabolical assurance, it was he—he with his smiles, his bows, his gorgeous *boutonnière*, the wonderful air he has of being anointed and gilded—he that had ruined my poor Eunice, who grew whiter than ever as he approached : when I felt all this my blood began to tingle, and if I were only a handsome woman I might believe that my eyes shone like those of an avenging angel. He was as fresh as a day in June, enormous, and more than ever like Haroun-al-Raschid. I asked him to take a walk with me ; and just for an instant, before accepting, he looked at me, as the French say, in the white of the eyes. But he pretended to be

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delighted, and we strolled away together to the path that leads down to the river. It was difficult to get away from the people—they were all over the place ; but I made him go so far that at the end of ten minutes we were virtually alone together. It was delicious to see how he hated it. It was then that I asked him what had become of his step-brother, and that he professed, as I have said, the utmost ignorance of Adrian's whereabouts. I hated him ; it was odious to me to be so close to him ; yet I could have endured this for hours in order to make him feel that I despised him. To make him feel it without saying it—there was an inspiration in that idea ; but it is very possible that it made me look more like a demon than like the angel I just mentioned. I told him in a moment, abruptly, that his step-brother would do well to remain away altogether in future , it was a farce his pretending to make my cousin reconsider her answer.

“ Why, then, did she ask him to come down here ? ”  
He launched this inquiry with confidence.

“ Because she thought it would be pleasant to have a man in the house , and Mr. Frank is such a harmless, discreet, accommodating one.”

“ Why, then, do you object to his coming back ? ”

He had made me contradict myself a little, and of course he enjoyed that. I was confused—confused by my agitation ; and I made the matter worse. I was furious that Eunice had made me promise not to speak, and my anger blinded me, as great anger always does, save in organisations so fine as Mr. Caliph's.

“ Because Eunice is in no condition to have company. She is very ill ; you can see for yourself.”

“ Very ill ? with a garden-party and a band of music ! Why, then, did she invite us all ? ”

“ Because she is a little crazy, I think.”

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" You are very consistent ! " he cried, with a laugh. " I know people who think every one crazy but themselves. I have had occasion to talk business with her several times of late, and I find her mind as clear as a bell."

" I wonder if you will allow me to say that you talk business too much ? Let me give you a word of advice : wind up her affairs at once without any more procrastination, and place them in her own hands. She is very nervous ; she knows this ought to have been done already. I recommend you strongly to make an end of the matter."

I had no idea I could be so insolent, even in conversation with a swindler. I confess I didn't do it so well as I might, for my voice trembled perceptibly in the midst of my efforts to be calm. He had picked up two or three stones and was tossing them into the river, making them skim the surface for a long distance. He held one poised a moment, turning his eye askance on me ; then he let it fly, and it danced for a hundred yards. I wondered whether in what I had just said I broke my vow to Eunice ; and it seemed to me that I didn't, inasmuch as I appeared to assume that no irreparable wrong had been done her.

" Do you wish yourself to get control of her property ? " Mr. Caliph inquired, after he had made his stone skim. It was magnificently said, far better than anything I could do ; and I think I answered it—though it made my heart beat fast—almost with a smile of applause.

" Aren't you afraid ? " I asked in a moment, very gently.

" Afraid of what—of you ? "

" Afraid of justice—of Eunice's friends ? "

" That means you, of course. Yes, I am very much afraid. When was a man not, in the presence of a clever woman ? "

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"I am clever ; but I am not clever enough. If I were, you should have no doubt of it."

He folded his arms as he stood there before me, looking at me in that way I have mentioned more than once—like a genial Mephistopheles. "I must repeat what I have already told you, that I wish I had known you ten years ago ! "

"How you must hate me to say that !" I exclaimed. "That's some comfort, just a little—your hating me."

"I can't tell you how it makes me feel to see you so indiscreet," he went on, as if he had ~~not~~ heard me. "Ah, my dear lady, don't meddle—a woman like you ! Think of the bad taste of it."

"It's bad if you like ; but yours is far worse."

"Mine ! What do you know about mine ? What do you know about me ? See how superficial it makes you." He paused a moment, smiling almost compassionately ; and then he said, with an abrupt change of tone and manner, as if our conversation wearied him and he wished to sum up and return to the house, "See that she marries Adrian ; that's all you have to do ! "

"That's a beautiful idea of yours ! You know you don't believe in it yourself !" These words broke from me as he turned away, and we ascended the hill together.

"It's the only thing I believe in," he answered, very gravely.

"What a pity for you that your brother doesn't ! For he ~~doesn't~~—I persist in that !" I said this because it seemed to me just then to be the thing I could think of that would exasperate him most. The event proved I was right.

He stopped short in the path—gave me a very bad look. "Do you want him for yourself ? Have *you* been making love to him ? "

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" Ah, Mr. Caliph, for a man who talks about taste ! " I answered.

" Taste be damned ! " cried Mr. Caliph, as he went on again.

" That's quite my idea ! " He broke into an unexpected laugh, as if I had said something very amusing, and we proceeded in silence to the top of the hill. Then I suddenly said to him, as we emerged upon the lawn, " Aren't you really a little afraid ? "

He stopped again, looking toward the house and at the brilliant groups with which the lawn was covered. We had lost the music, but we began to hear it again. " Afraid ? of course I am ! I'm immensely afraid. It comes over me in such a scene as this. But I don't see what good it does you to know."

" It makes me rather happy." That was a fib ; for it didn't, somehow, when he looked and talked in that way. He has an absolutely bottomless power of mockery ; and really, absurd as it appears, for that instant I had a feeling that it was quite magnanimous of him not to let me know what he thought of my idiotic attempt to frighten him. He feels strong and safe somehow, somewhere ; but I can't discover why he should, inasmuch as he certainly doesn't know Eunice's secret, and it is only her state of mind that gives him impunity. He believes her to be merely credulous ; convinced by his specious arguments that everything will be right in a few months ; a little nervous, possibly—to justify my account of her—but for the present, at least, completely at his mercy. The present, of course, is only what now concerns him ; for the future he has invented Adrian Frank. How he clings to this invention was proved by the last words he said to me before we separated on the lawn ; they almost indicate that he has a conscience, and this is so extraordinary——



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"She must marry Adrian! She must marry Adrian!"

With this he turned away and went to talk to various people whom he knew. He talked to every one; diffused his genial influence all over the place, and contributed greatly to the brilliancy of the occasion. I hadn't therefore the comfort of feeling that Mrs. Ermine was more of a waterspout than usual, when she said to me afterwards that Mr. Caliph was a man to adore, and that the party would have been quite "ordinary" without him. "I mean in comparison, you know." And then she said to me, suddenly, with her blank impertinence: "Why don't you set your cap at him? I should think you would!"

"Is it possible you have not observed my frantic efforts to captivate him?" I answered. "Didn't you notice how I drew him away and made him walk with me by the river? It's too soon to say, but I really think I am gaining ground." For so mild a pleasure it really pays to mystify Mrs. Ermine! I kept away from Eunice till almost every one had gone. I knew that she would look at me in a certain way, and I didn't wish to meet her eyes. I have a bad conscience, for turn it as I would I *had* broken my vow. Mr. Caliph went away without my meeting him again; but I saw that half an hour before he left he strolled to a distance with Eunice. I instantly guessed what his business was; he had made up his mind to present to her directly, and in person, the question of her marrying his step-brother. What a happy inspiration, and what a well-selected occasion! When she came back I saw that she had been crying, though I imagine no one else did. I know the signs of her tears, even when she has checked them as quickly as she must have done to-day. Whatever it was that had passed between them, it diverted her from looking at me, when we were alone together, in

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that way I was afraid of. Mrs. Ermine is prolific ; there is no end to the images that succeed each other in her mind. Late in the evening, after the last carriage had rolled away, we went up the staircase together, and at the top she detained me a moment.

“ I have been thinking it over, and I am afraid that there is no chance for you. I have reason to believe that he proposed to-day to Eunice ! ”

*August 19.*—Eunice is very ill, as I was sure she would be, after the effort of her horrible festival. She kept going for three days more ; then she broke down completely, and for a week now she has been in bed. I have had no time to write, for I have been constantly with her, in alternation with Mrs. Ermine. Mrs. Ermine was about to leave us after the garden-party, but when Eunice gave up she announced that she would stay and take care of her. Eunice tells me that she is a good nurse, except that she talks too much, and of course she gives me a chance to rest. Eunice's condition is strange ; she has no fever, but her life seems to have ebbed away. She lies with her eyes shut, perfectly conscious, answering when she is spoken to, but immersed in absolute rest. It is as if she had had some terrible strain or fatigue, and wished to steep herself in oblivion. I am not anxious about her—am much less frightened than Mrs. Ermine or the doctor, for whom she is apparently dying of weakness. I tell the doctor I understand her condition—I have seen her so before. It will last probably a month, and then she will slowly pull herself together. The poor man accepts this theory for want of a better, and evidently depends upon me to see her through, as he says. Mrs. Ermine wishes to send for one of the great men from New York, but I have opposed this idea, and shall continue to oppose it. There is (to my mind) a kind of cruelty in exhibiting the poor girl to more people

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than are absolutely necessary. The dullest of them would see that she is in love. The seat of her illness is in her mind, in her soul, and no rude hands must touch her there. She herself has protested—she has murmured a prayer that she may be forced to see no one else. “I only want to be left alone—to be left alone.” So we leave her alone—that is, we simply watch and wait. She will recover—people don’t die of these things; she will live to suffer—to suffer always. I am tired to-night, but Mrs. Ermine is with her, and I shall not be wanted till morning; therefore, before I lie down, I will repair in these remarkable pages a serious omission. I scarcely know why I should have written all this, except that the history of things interests me, and I find that it is even a greater pleasure to write it than to read it. If what I have committed to this little book hitherto has not been profitless, I must make a note of an incident which I think more curious than any of the scenes I have described.

Adrian Frank reappeared the day after the garden-party—late in the afternoon, while I sat in the verandah and watched the sunset and Eunice strolled down to the river with Mrs. Ermine. I had heard no sound of wheels, and there was no evidence of a vehicle or of luggage. He had not come through the house, but walked round it from the front, having apparently been told by one of the servants that we were in the grounds. On seeing me he stopped, hesitated a moment, then came up to the steps, shook hands in silence, seated himself near me and looked at me through the dusk. This was all tolerably mysterious, and it was even more so after he had explained a little. I told him that he was a day after the fair, that he had been considerably missed, and even that he was slightly wanting in respect to Eunice. Since he had absented himself from her

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party it was not quite delicate to assume that she was ready to receive him at his own time. I don't know what made me so truculent—as if there were any danger of his having really not considered us, or his lacking a good reason. It was simply, I think, that my talk with Mr. Caliph the evening before had made me so much bad blood and left me in a savage mood. Mr. Frank answered that he had not stayed away by accident—he had stayed away on purpose ; he had been for several days at Saratoga, and on returning to Cornerville had taken quarters at the inn in the village. He had no intention of presuming further on Eunice's hospitality, and had walked over from the hotel simply to bid us good-evening and give an account of himself.

“ My dear Mr. Frank, your account is not clear ! ” I said, laughing. “ What in the world were you doing at Saratoga ? ” I must add that his humility had completely disarmed me ; I was ashamed of the brutality with which I had received him, and convinced afresh that he was the best fellow in the world.

“ What was I doing at Saratoga ? I was trying hard to forget you ! ”

This was Mr. Frank's rejoinder ; and I give it exactly as he uttered it ; or rather, not exactly, inasmuch as I cannot give the tone—the quick, startling tremor of his voice. But those are the words with which he answered my superficially intended question. I saw in a moment that he meant a great deal by them—I became aware that we were suddenly in deep waters ; that *he* was, at least, and that he was trying to draw me into the stream. My surprise was immense, complete ; I had absolutely not suspected what he went on to say to me. He said many things,—but I needn't write them here. It is not in detail that I see the propriety of narrating this incident ; I suppose a woman may be trusted to remember the

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form of such assurances. Let me simply say that the poor dear young man has an idea that he wants to marry me. For a moment—just a moment—I thought he was jesting ; then I saw, in the twilight, that he was pale with seriousness. He is perfectly sincere! It is strange, but it is real, and, moreover, it is his own affair. For myself, when I have said I was amazed, I have said everything ; *en tête-à-tête* with myself I needn't blush and protest. I was not in the least annoyed or alarmed ; I was filled with kindness and consideration, and I was extremely interested. He talked to me for a quarter of an hour ; it seemed a very long time. I asked him to go away ; not to wait till Eunice and Mrs. Ermine should come back. Of course I refused him, by the way.

It was the last thing I was expecting at this time of day, and it gave me a great deal to think of. I lay awake that night ; I found I was more agitated than I supposed, and all sorts of visions came and went in my head. I shall not marry the young Adrian : I am bound to say that vision was not one of them ; but as I thought over what he had said to me it became more clear, more conceivable. I began now to be a little surprised at my surprise. It appears that I have had the honour to please him from the first ; when he began to come to see us it was not for Eunice, it was for me. He made a general confession on this subject. He was afraid of me ; he thought me proud, sarcastic, cold, a hundred horrid things ; it didn't seem to him possible that we should ever be on a footing of familiarity which would enable him to propose to me. He regarded me, in short, as unattainable, out of the question, and made up his mind to admire me for ever in silence. (In plain English, I suppose he thought I was too old, and he has simply got used to the difference in our years.) But he wished to be near me, to see me, and

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hear me (I am really writing more details than seem worth while) ; so that when his step-brother recommended him to try and marry Eunice he jumped at the opportunity to make good his place. This situation reconciled everything. He could oblige his brother, he could pay a high compliment to my cousin, and he could see me every day or two. He was convinced from the first that he was in no danger ; he was morally sure that Eunice would never smile upon his suit. He didn't know why, and he doesn't know why yet ; it was only an instinct. That suit was avowedly perfunctory ; still the young Adrian has been a great comedian. He assured me that if he had proved to be wrong, and Eunice had suddenly accepted him, he would have gone with her to the altar and made her an excellent husband ; for he would have acquired in this manner the certainty of seeing for the rest of his life a great deal of me ! To think of one's possessing, all unexpected, this miraculous influence ! When he came down here, after Eunice had refused him, it was simply for the pleasure of living in the house with me ; from that moment there was no comedy—everything was clear and comfortable betwixt him and Eunice. I asked him if he meant by this that she knew of the sentiments he entertained for her companion, and he answered that he had never breathed a word on this subject, and flattered himself that he had kept the thing dark. He had no reason to believe that she guessed his motives, and I may add that I have none either ; they are altogether too extraordinary ! As I have said, it was simply time, and the privilege of seeing more of me, that had dispelled his hesitation. I didn't reason with him ; and though, once I was fairly enlightened, I gave him the most respectful attention, I didn't appear to consider his request too seriously. But I *did* touch upon the fact that I am five or six years older than he : I suppose I needn't mention that it was not in a

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spirit of coquetry. His rejoinder was very gallant ; but it belongs to the class of details. He is really in love—heaven forgive him ! but I shall not marry him. How strange are the passions of men !

I saw Mr. Frank the next day ; I had given him leave to come back at noon. He joined me in the grounds, where as usual I had set up my easel. I left it to his discretion to call first at the house and explain both his absence and his presence to Eunice and Mrs. Ermine—the latter especially—ignorant as yet of his visit the night before, of which I had not spoken to them. He sat down beside me on a garden-chair and watched me as I went on with my work. For half an hour very few words passed between us ; I felt that he was happy to sit there, to be near me, to see me—strange as it seems ! and for myself there was a certain sweetness in knowing it, though it was the sweetness of charity, not of elation or triumph. He must have seen I was only pretending to paint—if he followed my brush, which I suppose he didn't. My mind was full of a determination I had arrived at after many waverings in the hours of the night. It had come to me toward morning as a kind of inspiration. I could never marry him, but was there not some way in which I could utilise his devotion ? At the present moment, only forty-eight hours later, it seems strange, unreal, almost grotesque ; but for ten minutes I thought I saw the light. As we sat there under the great trees, in the stillness of the noon, I suddenly turned and said to him—

“ I thank you for everything you have told me ; it gives me very nearly all the pleasure you could wish. I believe in you ; I accept every assurance of your devotion. I think that devotion is capable of going very far ; and I am going to put it to a tremendous test, one of the greatest, probably, to which a man was ever subjected.”

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He stared, leaning forward, with his hands on his knees. "Any test—any test——" he murmured.

"Don't give up Eunice, then ; make another trial ; I wish her to marry you !"

My words may have sounded like an atrocious joke, but they represented for me a great deal of hope and cheer. They brought a deep blush into Adrian Frank's face ; he winced a little, as if he had been struck by a hand whose blow he could not return, and the tears suddenly started to his eyes. "Oh, Miss Condit !" he exclaimed.

What I saw before me was bright and definite ; his distress seemed to me no obstacle, and I went on with a serenity of which I longed to make him perceive the underlying support. "Of course what I say seems to you like a deliberate insult ; but nothing would induce me to give you pain if it were possible to spare you. But it isn't possible, my dear friend ; it isn't possible. There is pain for you in the best thing I can say to you ; there are situations in life in which we can only accept our pain. I can never marry you ; I shall never marry any one. I am an old maid, and how can an old maid have a husband ? I will be your friend, your sister, your brother, your mother, but I will never be your wife. I should like immensely to be your brother, for I don't like the brother you have got, and I think you deserve a better one. I believe, as I tell you, in everything you have said to me—in your affection, your tenderness, your honesty, the full consideration you have given to the whole matter. I am happier and richer for knowing it all ; and I can assure you that it gives something to life which life didn't have before. We shall be good friends, dear friends, always, whatever happens. But I can't be your wife—I want you for some one else. You will say I have changed—that I ought to have spoken in this way three months ago. But I haven't



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changed—it is circumstances that have changed. I see reasons for your marrying my cousin that I didn't see then. I can't say that she will listen to you now, any more than she did then ; I don't speak of her ; I speak only of you and of myself. I wish you to make another attempt ; and I wish you to make it, this time, with my full confidence and support. Moreover, I attach a condition to it—a condition I will tell you presently. Do you think me slightly demented, malignantly perverse, atrociously cruel ? If you could see the bottom of my heart you would find something there which, I think, would almost give you joy. To ask you to do something you don't want to do as a substitute for something you desire, and to attach to the hard achievement a condition which will require a good deal of thinking of and will certainly make it harder—you may well believe I have some extraordinary reason for taking such a line as this. For remember, to begin with, that I can never marry you."

" Never—never—never ? "

" Never, never, never."

" And what is your extraordinary reason ? "

" Simply that I wish Eunice to have your protection, your kindness, your fortune."

" My fortune ? "

" She has lost her own. She will be poor."

" Pray, how has she lost it ? " the poor fellow asked, beginning to frown, and more and more bewildered.

" I can't tell you that, and you must never ask. But, the fact is certain. The greater part of her property has gone ; she has known it for some little time."

" For some little time ? Why, she never showed any change."

" You never saw it, that was all ! You were thinking of me," and I believe I accompanied this

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remark with a smile—a smile which was most inconsiderate, for it could only mystify him more.

I think at first he scarcely believed me. "What a singular time to choose to give a large party!" he exclaimed, looking at me with eyes quite unlike his old—or rather his young—ones; eyes that, instead of overlooking half the things before them (which was their former habit), tried to see a great deal more in my face, in my words, than was visible on the surface. I don't know what poor Adrian Frank saw—I shall never know all that he saw.

"I agree with you that it was a very singular time," I said. "You don't understand me—you can't—I don't expect you to," I went on. "That is what I mean by devotion, and that is the kind of appeal I make to you: to take me on trust, to act in the dark, to do something simply because I wish it."

He looked at me as if he would fathom the depths of my soul, and my soul had never seemed to myself so deep. "To marry your cousin—that's all?" he said, with a strange little laugh.

"Oh no, it's not all: to be very kind to her as well."

"To give her plenty of money, above all?"

"You make me feel very ridiculous; but I should not make this request of you if you had not a fortune."

"She can have my money without marrying me."

"That's absurd. How could she take your money?"

"How, then, can she take me?"

"That's exactly what I wish to see. I told you with my own lips, weeks ago, that she would only marry a man she should love; and I may seem to contradict myself in taking up now a supposition so different. But, as I tell you, everything has changed."

"You think her capable, in other words, of marrying for money."

"For money? Is your money all there is of you?"

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Is there a better fellow than you—is there a more perfect gentleman? "

He turned away his face at this, leaned it in his hands and groaned. I pitied him, but I wonder now that I shouldn't have pitied him more; that my pity should not have checked me. But I was too full of my idea. "It's like a fate," he murmured; "first my brother, and then you. I can't understand."

"Yes, I know your brother wants it—wants it now more than ever. But I don't care what your brother wants; and my idea is entirely independent of his. I have not the least conviction that you will succeed at first any better than you have done already. But it may be only a question of time, if you will wait and watch, and let me help you. You know you asked me to help you before, and then I wouldn't. But I repeat it again and again, at present everything is changed. Let me wait with you, let me watch with you. If you succeed, you will be very dear to me; if you fail, you will be still more so. You see it's an act of devotion, if there ever was one. I am quite aware that I ask of you something unprecedented and extraordinary. Oh, it may easily be too much for you. I can only put it before you—that's all; and as I say, I can help you. You will both be my children—I shall be near you always. If you can't marry me, perhaps you will make up your mind that this is the next best thing. You know you said that last night, yourself."

He had begun to listen to me a little, as if he were being persuaded. "Of course, I should let her know that I love you."

"She is capable of saying that you can't love me more than she does."

"I don't believe she is capable of saying any such folly. But we shall see."

"Yes; but not to-day, not to-morrow. Not at

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all for the present. You must wait a great many months."

"I will wait as long as you please."

"And you mustn't say a word to me of the kind you said last night."

"Is that your condition?"

"Oh no; my condition is a very different matter, and very difficult. It will probably spoil everything."

"Please, then, let me hear it at once."

"It is very hard for me to mention it; you must give me time." I turned back to my little easel and began to daub again; but I think my hand trembled, for my heart was beating fast. There was a silence of many moments; I couldn't make up my mind to speak.

"How in the world has she lost her money?" Mr. Frank asked abruptly, as if the question had just come into his mind. "Hasn't my brother the charge of her affairs?"

"Mr. Caliph is her trustee. I can't tell you how the losses have occurred."

He got up quickly. "Do you mean that they have occurred through *him*?"

I looked up at him, and there was something in his face which made me leave my work and rise also. "I will tell you my condition now," I said. "It is that you should ask no questions—not one!" This was not what I had had in my mind; but I had not courage for more, and this had to serve.

He had turned very pale, and I laid my hand on his arm, while he looked at me as if he wished to wrest my secret out of my eyes. My secret, I call it, by courtesy; God knows I had come terribly near telling it. God will forgive me, but Eunice probably will not. Had I broken my vow, or had I kept it? I asked myself this, and the answer, so far as I read it in Mr. Frank's eyes, was not reassuring. I dreaded

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his next question ; but when it came it was not what I had expected. Something violent took place in his own mind—something I couldn't follow.

" If I do what you ask me, what will be my reward ? "

" You will make me very happy."

" And what shall I make your cousin ?—God help us ! "

" Less wretched than she is to-day."

" Is she ' wretched ' ? " he asked, frowning as he did before—a most distressing change in his mild mask.

" Ah, when I think that I have to tell you that—that you have never noticed it—I despair ! " I exclaimed, with a laugh.

I had laid my hand on his arm, and he placed his right hand upon it, holding it there. He kept it a moment in his grasp, and then he said, " Don't despair ! "

" Promise me to wait," I answered. " Everything is in your waiting."

" I promise you ! " After which he asked me to kiss him, and I did so, on the lips. It was as if he were starting on a journey—leaving me for a long time.

" Will you come when I send for you ? " I asked.

" I adore you ! " he said ; and he turned quickly away, to leave the place without going near the house. I watched him, and in a moment he was gone. He has not reappeared ; and when I found, at lunch, that neither Eunice nor Mrs. Ermine alluded to his visit, I determined to keep the matter to myself. I said nothing about it, and up to the moment Eunice was taken ill—the next evening—he was not mentioned between us. I believe Mrs. Ermine more than once gave herself up to wonder as to his whereabouts, and declared that he had not the perfect manners of his

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step-brother, who was a religious observer of the *convenances* ; but I think I managed to listen without confusion. Nevertheless, I had a bad conscience, and I have it still. It throbs a good deal as I sit there with Eunice in her darkened room. I *have* given her away ; I *have* broken my vow. But what I wrote above is not true ; she *will* forgive me ! I sat at my easel for an hour after Mr. Frank left me, and then suddenly I found that I had cured myself of my folly by giving it out. It was the result of a sudden passion of desire to do something for Eunice. Passion is blind, and when I opened my eyes I saw ten thousand difficulties ; that is, I saw one, which contained all the rest. That evening I wrote to Mr. Frank, to his New York address, to tell him that I had had a fit of madness, and that it had passed away ; but that I was sorry to say it was not any more possible for me to marry him. I have had no answer to this letter ; but what answer can he make to that last declaration ? He will continue to adore me. How strange are the passions of men !

*New York, November 20.*—I have been silent for three months, for good reasons. Eunice was ill for many weeks, but there was never a moment when I was really alarmed about her ; I knew she would recover. In the last days of October she was strong enough to be brought up to town, where she had business to transact, and now she is almost herself again. I say almost, advisedly ; for she will never be herself,—her old, sweet, trustful self, so far as I am concerned. She has simply not forgiven me ! • Strange things have happened—things that I don't dare to consider too closely, lest I should not forgive myself. Eunice is in complete possession of her property ! Mr. Caliph has made over to her everything—everything that had passed away ; everything of which, three months ago, he could give no account whatever.

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He was with her in the country for a long day before we came up to town (during which I took care not to meet her), and after our return he was in and out of this house repeatedly. I once asked Eunice what he had to say to her, and she answered that he was "explaining." A day or two later she told me that he had given a complete account of her affairs; everything was in order; she had been wrong in what she told me before. Beyond this little statement, however, she did no further penance for the impression she had given of Mr. Caliph's earlier conduct. She doesn't yet know what to think; she only feels that if she has recovered her property there has been some interference; and she traces, or at least imputes, such interference to me. If I have interfered, I have broken my vow; and for this, as I say, the gentle creature can't forgive me. If the passions of men are strange, the passions of women are stranger still! It was sweeter for her to suffer at Mr. Caliph's hands than to receive her simple dues from them. She looks at me askance, and her coldness shows through a conscientious effort not to let me see the change in her feeling. Then she is puzzled and mystified; she can't tell what has happened, or how and why it has happened. She has waked up from her illness into a different world—a world in which Mr. Caliph's accounts were correct after all; in which, with the washing away of his stains, the colour has been quite washed out of his rich physiognomy. She vaguely feels that a sacrifice, a great effort of some kind, has been made for her, whereas her plan of life was to make the sacrifices and efforts herself. Yet she asks me no questions; the property is her right, after all, and I think there are certain things she is afraid to know. But I am more afraid than she, for it comes over me that a great sacrifice has indeed been made. I have not seen Adrian Frank since he parted from me under the trees

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three months ago. He has gone to Europe, and the day before he left I got a note from him. It contained only these words: "When you send for me I will come. I am waiting, as you told me." It is my belief that up to the moment I spoke of Eunice's loss of money and requested him to ask no questions, he had not definitely suspected his noble kinsman, but that my words kindled a train that lay all ready. He went away then to his shame, to the intolerable weight of it, and to heaven knows what sickening explanations with his step-brother! That gentleman has a still more brilliant bloom; he looks to my mind exactly as people look who have accepted a sacrifice; and he hasn't had another word to say about Eunice's marrying Mr. Adrian Frank. Mrs. Ermine sticks to her idea that Mr. Caliph and Eunice will make a match; but my belief is that Eunice is cured. Oh yes, she is cured! But I have done more than I meant to do, and I have not done it as I meant to do it; and I am very weary, and I shall write no more.

*November 27.*—Oh yes, Eunice is cured! And that is what she has not forgiven me. Mr. Caliph told her yesterday that Mr. Frank meant to spend the winter in Rome.

*December 3.*—I have decided to return to Europe, and have written about my apartment in Rome. I shall leave New York, if possible, on the 10th. Eunice tells me she can easily believe I shall be happier there.

*December 7.*—I *must* note something I had the satisfaction to-day to say to Mr. Caliph. He has not been here for three weeks, but this afternoon he came to call. He is no longer the trustee; he is only the visitor. I was alone in the library, into which he was ushered; and it was ten minutes before Eunice appeared. We had some talk, though my disgust for him is now unspeakable. At first it was of a



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very perfunctory kind ; but suddenly he said, with more than his old impudence, " That was a most extraordinary interview of ours, at Cornerville ! " I was surprised at his saying only this, for I expected him to take his revenge on me by some means or other for having put his brother on the scent of his misdeeds. I can only account for his silence on that subject by the supposition that Mr. Frank has been able to extract from him some pledge that I shall not be molested. He was, however, such an image of unrighteous success that the sight of him filled me with gall, and I tried to think of something which would make him smart.

" I don't know what you have done, nor how you have done it," I said ; " but you took a very round-about way to arrive at certain ends. There was a time when you might have married Eunice."

It was of course nothing new that we were frank with each other, and he only repeated, smiling, " Married Eunice ? "

" She was very much in love with you last spring."

" Very much in love with me ? "

" Oh, it's over now. Can't you imagine that ? She's cured."

He broke into a laugh, but I felt I had startled him.

" You are the most delightful woman ! " he cried.

" Think how much simpler it would have been—I mean originally, when things were right, if they ever were right. Don't you see my point ? But now it's too late. She has seen you when you were not on show. I assure you she is cured ! "

At this moment Eunice came in, and just afterwards I left the room. I am sure it was a revelation, and that I have given him a *mauvais quart d'heure*.

Rome, February 23.—When I came back to this dear place Adrian Frank was not here, and I learned

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that he had gone to Sicily. A week ago I wrote to him : " You said you would come if I should send for you. I should be glad if you would come now." Last evening he appeared, and I told him that I could no longer endure my suspense in regard to a certain subject. Would he kindly inform me what he had done in New York after he left me under the trees at Cornerville ? Of what sacrifice had he been guilty ; to what high generosity—terrible to me to think of—had he committed himself ? He would tell me very little ; but he is almost a poor man. He has just enough income to live in Italy.

*May 9.*—Mrs. Ermine has taken it into her head to write to me. I have heard from her three times ; and in her last letter, received yesterday, she returns to her old refrain that Eunice and Mr. Caliph will soon be united. I don't know what may be going on ; but can it be possible that I put it into his head ? Truly, I have a felicitous touch !

*May 15.*—I told Adrian yesterday that I would marry him if ever Eunice should marry Mr. Caliph. It was the first time I had mentioned his step-brother's name to him since the explanation I had attempted to have with him after he came back to Rome ; and he evidently didn't like it at all.

*In the Tyrol, August*—I sent Mrs. Ermine a little water-colour in return for her last letter, for I can't write to her, and that is easier. She now writes me again, in order to get another water-colour. She speaks of course of Eunice and Mr. Caliph, and for the first time there appears a certain reality in what she says. She complains that Eunice is very slow in coming to the point, and relates that poor Mr. Caliph, who has taken her into his confidence, seems at times almost to despair. Nothing would suit him better of course than to appropriate two fortunes : two are so much better than one. But however much he may

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have explained, he can hardly have explained everything. Adrian Frank is in Scotland ; in writing to him three days ago I had occasion to repeat that I will marry him on the day on which a certain other marriage takes place. In that way I am safe. I shall send another water-colour to Mrs Ermine. Water-colours or no, Eunice doesn't write to me. It is clear that she hasn't forgiven me ! She regards me as perjured ; and of course I am. Perhaps she will marry him after all.

THE END



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